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THE TEMPTATIONS OF MOURAD



THE TEMPTATIONS  
OF MOURAD

A NOVEL BY LUCIENNE FAVRE, TRANSLATED  
FROM THE FRENCH BY WILLARD R. TRASK

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THE TEMPTATIONS OF MOURAD



P A R T

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C H A P T E R

♦ I ♦

CONFESSION" might be a better word to put on the title-page of this narrative—instead of "novel." But "Confession" is austere and implies a feeling of remorse—which is not what I feel when I think of my life, even though it has not been the life of a philosopher.

"Confession," furthermore, is a title which is rather too reminiscent of a certain masterpiece of French literature. Besides, it is possible that I may embroider the truth here and there, quite unintentionally . . . It is hard to be frank . . . A man is not always frank when he thinks he is so . . . Sometimes a man is frank without meaning to be so, frank because a voice cries from his heart. I hope I shall not stifle that cry from the heart.

My ambition is this: to offer the world an account of my country, of my people, and of their relations with our conquerors—an account less untrue and less superficial than

those so far published by professional writers, after a century of French occupation.

So I shall not discourse on the theme of the *kaid's* fatal love for the colonist's daughter, nor yet on the theme of the Christian's fatal love for the fair Fatima. Such things are most uncommon here, between people of different races and opposed customs, and who do not mix. So far as my own observation goes, I have never seen such a case, and it would not be hard to prove that there have been almost no half-breeds in North Africa since 1830.

There has been a decided tendency to describe Moslem citizens in this evolutionary period as renegades or rebels. I do not think that I am either a rebel or a renegade.

Yet it is true that at a certain period of my life I suffered from the thought that I was one of a conquered people. And then I resigned myself to the situation. A man is always conquered sooner or later, just as he grows old after having been young. It is bearable—provided that those who follow you on the paths of glory really know the value of the treasure you bequeath to them.

In times past the Moslems gave the world more than their share of civilization and courage. As for poetry and a love of grandeur, even in our days these have not ceased to enrich the lives of our humblest folk.

I have a friend whose name is Mahmud and who is a true philosopher. He is also a conductor on the C.F.R.A., the principal street-car line in the city of Algiers. So all week on his job, he wears a rather austere uniform, occidental in style and buttoned up to the neck.

But on his days off, his coat is unbuttoned over a pink silk vest, embroidered with gold, and that suffices to make him a sumptuous Oriental. Mahmud has thus found a way to unite two worlds. I should be happy if this narrative might do as

much. But now I had better begin my story—at the beginning.

My name is Mourad. I was born about the end of the last century in Kabylia, in a village which I shall not name. I do not think that the members of my family would care to appear in a story which anyone may read. And though they are isolated from the great world and though many of them are illiterate, if I were to give the specific location of my native village, they would find it out in the end. For let a thing be written or spoken, and it will come to the knowledge even of the deaf and the blind.

At the time of which I write, our *duar* comprised about a hundred low houses with red tile roofs, and some thatched huts built of mud mixed with straw. In winter they are covered with snow, in summer the sirocco burns them. These extremes of temperature have forged the Berber soul, tempering it like those swords which are plunged into ice-water when they are taken from the forge.

Most of the houses in the village had only one room, in which household livestock, grain, and olive-oil were packed together. Our house, which was larger, contained three principal rooms. The first was given over to the women and children. The second sheltered the livestock in winter. The men slept, fully dressed, in a loft built over this room. The third served as a gathering place during the day. At night, my father slept there, with one or the other of his wives.

My father was named Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif. He was the leading man in our village, and also the best-educated and the wisest. For which reason he had been named chief of the *Jemma*, the assembly of notables and aged men which looks after the material and moral interests of every Kabyle community.

There were eight of us children living. Seven others, less robust physically, had died in infancy.



Spartan educations begin a process of selection at birth. Only the strong survive.

I was the sixth child and fifth son.

My oldest brother was named Ali; he was obliged to leave home and become a soldier.

The next oldest, whose name was Ahmed, was brought up in another part of the country, for reasons which I shall give later.

Omar was patient, taciturn, and hard-working. When I think of him, I always see him stooped over the soil.

Belkasim had no liking for anything but travel and adventure. He was brought back home to the *duar* by force several times. Yet he disappeared one day, without leaving a trace. God alone knows whether he will ever return to us.

My eldest sister was named Leila. I seem to remember that she was blonde and beautiful. But she was married so young that I hardly had time to know her. And after her marriage her name was never mentioned, because her new family behaved very badly toward ours.

My other sister, whose name was Zohra, was dark and strong and talkative—there was nothing particular in her life or her character which is worth setting down here.

Lakdar was only my half-brother. One of my father's younger brothers, who lived in the city of Miliana, had died prematurely, leaving a young wife and a little daughter, whom we had perforce to take in. Later, my father married the widow; she bore him two daughters who did not survive, and Lakdar, who always treated me as if the same womb had given birth to us both.

My mother, who was much the older of my father's two wives, was named Khadija. His second wife was named Mariam. They got along quite well together, seldom quarreled (and always out of earshot of the men), and never to my knowledge reached the stage of insults and blows—which

is not as unusual a state of things in Moslem households as one might suppose.

For neither law nor custom can prevent jealousy and temperamental incompatibility between the wives of one man.

But, in our house, the first wife did not abuse her rights as the elder and put the hardest and dirtiest work onto the second. And the second, by her deference, tried to make the first forget that she was no longer sole mistress of the house.

As for my father, he treated his wives with scrupulous equality, according to the time-honored rule for avoiding misunderstandings.

He slept with them alternately—one night with one, the next with the other. Nor was anything permitted to interfere with this fixed rotation, nor did he ever show the preference which he could not but have felt for the younger of his wives.

My mother had been beautiful, but work in the fields and numerous childbirths had prematurely faded her face and tired her body. She was dark and tall. To the day of her death she kept her beautiful bright eyes, which she always ringed with kohl, and the regal gait of our women, who carry on their heads full jars of precious water from distant springs over mountain pathways without spilling a drop.

She was very active, rising before anyone else in the family and going to bed last. She was an expert farmer. God had also granted her the gift of healing the sick, and her hand, which sowed our wheat, could still the fever that is born in the depths of our oleander-bordered wadis.

Mariam, my father's second wife, was short and blonde, with eyes like the sky. She was neither as beautiful nor as strong as my mother, but she was obliging, and she was expert in other crafts. She spun and wove our wool. By her efforts, the mosque in our village was embellished with beautiful carpets. It was said that she had acquired her skill

from the teaching of Christian nuns and that they had had her baptized. She seemed not to remember this . . . Yet sometimes, when she thought that she was alone, she wept, and she carefully preserved a photograph of the city of Miliana, where she had known golden years. By day she hid this relic in her bosom; at night she put it under the mat which served her as a bed. For our religion forbids the cult of images, and my father allowed no trifling with religious precepts.

Mariam had brought us a more fastidious way of living and certain refinements. She was always sweeping the house, pitilessly hunting down flies and vermin, setting out flowers in pottery jars. She would even have been glad to cook tasty dishes for us. But except on high holidays our people ate only the simplest fare. We lived on a sort of pancake, dipped in the olive-oil which was stored in jars cemented to the inside of the house, along the wall of the principal room. Milk and its products, figs, or honey were sometimes added to this frugal diet.

Economy is one of the Kabyle virtues. We are known as the Auvergnats of North Africa.

Except for agricultural equipment, which was extremely primitive in those days, we bought almost nothing which had to be paid for in money. Certain much-needed products—such as sugar, salt, coffee, soap—never entered our house unless they had been acquired by barter. We seldom used artificial light and economized candles and kerosene as if they had been irreplaceable. As for electricity, there was no such thing as yet—at least in our *duar*.

We lived an archaic life, and yet the French colonists' first automobiles were beginning to buzz like angry bees along the road which wound its way below us, circling the mountain.

My years could still be counted on the fingers of one hand when I began to learn how to tend my father's flock. It could not be otherwise. My older brothers had all been shepherds before me. My younger brother would be a shepherd after me. It was easy work, and a Kabyle shepherd has more amusements that one would suppose.

I have good eyes. From my high post I could take possession of a vast horizon of mountains and plains in one sweeping glance. On the roads, horsemen and foot-passengers looked hardly bigger than flies. It was a game for me to follow them, as they disappeared at one point only to reappear at another.

Sometimes, too, some invisible animal could be heard moving in the depths of the brush . . . then the dogs would bark, chivvying the timid sheep toward me . . . the boar is hunted in our forests . . . perhaps they still shelter a few panthers. Panthers were quite numerous at the period to which I refer. They did not attack human beings as a rule. But the eagles would carry off one of our lambs from time to time. They were sole lords of the sky until the day when airplanes began to roar across their pathways and cast the shadow of their cloth wings on the eagles' eyries.

I learned to play on a reed flute and to communicate with other young shepherds, posted on near-by summits, by means of cries and a special set of mimetic gestures.

We were able to receive and transmit the news of the entire countryside with the speed of a storm. Even the employees of the mysterious telegraph service knew less quickly than we that So-and-So had been killed thirty miles away, that a ship was sinking off the coast, that a flight of locusts was threatening the South.

When I was tired of playing my flute, of receiving and sending gossip, I told myself stories.

It was my father who had wakened a love of stories in me.

On winter nights he would often tell us tales and recount the legends of our great past.

The Kabyle language is a dialect which has never been written. That is why my father, smoking his narghile, transmitted the wise precepts and the high deeds of our race to us by word of mouth, as they had been transmitted to him. So likewise, in years to come, we should tell them to our sons.

He gave us our first taste of knowledge. I have forgotten many things which I have read. But until I die I shall doubtless remember the things my father taught me during the long nights of the hard Kabyle winter.

At times the narrator might not follow a strict chronological order and might take certain liberties with what others call "historical truth." But the things he evoked had the power to give us something essential—the feeling that it was an honor to be a Kabyle, even though in our days the greatness of our people seemed to have vanished from the map of the world and from the memory of most living men.

Since the beginning of time there have been Berbers in North Africa. Before the great invasions, they ruled over the entire country, plains and coasts, Tell and summits, and whether they were nomads or settled tribesmen, tillers of the soil or artisans, warriors or shepherds, caravaneers or coiners, they excelled in everything.

Their mastery had made them proud. . . . Pride is displeasing to God, because it is the mark of the Evil One. . . . God withdrew His favor from us. . . .

My father paused to revive the fire in his narghile. . . . Outside, wind and rain, or occasionally gusts of snow, whipped the house. . . . The dogs were howling at a wolf. The cold was piercing, but I was well clothed and I had my arms around a warm ewe, which from time to time suckled her lamb. . . . Somewhere on the other side of the partition

a child was crying and Mariam was soothing it by her singing; she had abundant patience, her voice was sweet, and she knew many songs.

Once again the coals in the narghile kindled to a red glow which lit up my father's face. A proud face, ascetically thin, with deeply sculptured features, dark shining eyes under a high and noble arch of brows.

He began to smoke again. His eyes were closed. He seemed to be listening to the voices of another age as they rose in his heart and mind.

Now the dogs had stopped howling. . . . The child was no longer crying—Mariam's song died away. My father went on telling his story. . . .

He showed us how, for centuries, our people had borne defeat; their prodigies of endurance, their perseverance in hope, although each time they had succumbed to superior numbers and, after fierce battles, were obliged to take refuge in the mountains—more easy to defend—where we still lived; how they had given up their lowlands only foot by foot to successive invaders: Romans, Vandals, Turks, and others.

Time moved on. No one thought of measuring its lapse. We could have listened to such things forever. And then the fire in the narghile began to dwindle again and my father said:

"Go now to your bed, O my son! Tomorrow, God willing, I shall continue our story."

A more modern type of instruction was given us by our Aunt Zohra.

Aunt Zohra, a sister of our maternal grandmother, had acquired the habit of coming to stay with us each time that a prolonged residence in the lowlands revived the demon of malaria in her body.

Twice widowed, Aunt Zohra had sons in Tunis who carried on a grocery business. She had money and she did not

conceal the fact that her money was the result of the patient levies she had laid on the incomes of her two husbands.

"Because," she used to say, "how could a woman have anything if she did not steal from men?"

Aunt Zohra was short, thin, and as vibrant as a cicada. She did not know what it was to sit down. Either she seemed to be at the point of death, or you would find her revived, standing on her feet, waving her arms. Her hands always helped her to explain things.

She insisted that she had been a beauty in her younger days. There was nothing left to show it. Now her nose overwhelmed her thin face.

"In the old days," she would say, "I had eyes like that—bigger than my mouth!"

This statement always delighted us, for her toothless mouth, distended with laughter, was so big that you could have put a whole orange into it, skin and all.

What with her short stature and apparent fragility, her heavy masculine features, her malicious glances, her power of mimicry, her way of perpetually throwing out her hands to ward off evil spells, her scathing comments, and her high, piping voice, Aunt Zohra was a figure out of our own Punch and Judy show, the Karagus.

She had traveled a good deal with her two successive husbands. With the first she had toured North Africa from Morocco to Tunis. With the second, who had operated a Tunisian stand at the Universal Exposition at Paris in 1900, she had explored France.

She had been carried through the air in a circle on the great Ferris Wheel, she had penetrated the bowels of the earth on the underground railway, and had almost gone blind from staring at illuminated fountains.

To us, all this seemed too fabulous to be true. So we remained skeptical for many years. And though we delighted

listening to Aunt Zohra, so far as we were concerned her descriptions of the commonest realities of the modern world were pure fantasies born of her avid appetite for fiction.

The more so because, whenever we tried to tease her by asking her to explain the origin and the operation of these miracles, she would stammer, shrug her shoulders, raise her eyebrows and finally say:

"How should I know? It's the work of the Devil!"

When Aunt Zohra was not describing the wonders of Western civilization, she was telling us about the life of the most beautiful of her daughters, the marvelous Aziba, who had married the greatest merchant in Tunis, and every year gave him a child as beautiful as herself.

If you could believe Aunt Zohra, Aziba was as white as milk, her eyes were black velvet, her hair was thick and as dark as night and so long that, when she let it down, it touched the ground. In short Aziba was both as slender as a reed and as buxom as the round moon.

To crown her charms, she had a tooth sheathed in gold. And, in such a beautiful mouth, the brightness of that changeless metal seemed to me to be one of those supreme subtleties of refinement which the corrupt West was tempting upon us one after the other.

Each time she left us, Aunt Zohra promised to come back very soon and bring Aziba. But it was sometimes many months before she returned, and she always came alone.

I have never seen Aziba. Yet she is still as real to me as the girls I used to meet every day in the streets of our *duar* in the days of my youth.

If Aunt Zohra could make me dream, she could even more effectively make me laugh. To this day, I have never heard anything to equal her mordant humor or the extent of her repertory.

She had a remarkable memory, and an audacity which



made up for any lack of documentation. Nothing was sacred to her except God. "And that," she used to say, "is because I am afraid of Him."

In the course of her travels, she had come into contact with people of all races, had discovered some of their secrets, and seen through many of their follies.

I have to admit that she made considerable use of Christians as comic figures. Old women are often cruel. That is why, among our people in by-gone days, the torture of enemies was left to the capable hands of old crones.

Each time Aunt Zohra came to stay with us, her arrival was greeted by shrill *yus-yus* from the women of our family, mingled with those of many other simple creatures who thought her wonderfully amusing and who did not often find an occasion for a good laugh, there in our village.

As a rule she would announce her arrival by a letter dictated to the public scribe whose place of business was nearest to her house. His name was Jaffar, he had enormous mustaches, and he was slightly deaf, which was rather trying.

"Because," Aunt Zohra used to say, "you have to shout your secrets to him instead of whispering them into his ear, and everyone in the street overhears you."

As soon as Aunt Zohra's letter would arrive, Mariam's eyes would become a more constant blue, like the sky in fair weather.

It was because our aunt brought the atmosphere of a city with her, and my father's second wife was homesick for city life, though she never dared to say so.

Singing to herself, she would go to prepare Aunt Zohra's quarters. This was a little house which stood not far from ours and which had formerly been used only as a place to store grain or our surplus stock of oil, and which was still used in this way when there was nothing more precious to put in it.

When the little house had been emptied and cleaned, every rug and piece of tapestry in the community was hung on the walls or laid on the floor. It might have been a mosque!

Then it was furnished with a few of the carved wooden coffers which we use as wardrobes, with chests of drawers, and trunks, and sometimes with chairs, with painted stands which supported jars and plates and jugs, for the art of pottery is honored among us.

Finally, candles were set in a seven-branched candlestick which one of our ancestors had plundered long ago in a *razzia* on a ghetto.

No one would dream of denying light to a woman as accustomed to the refinements of life as our Aunt Zohra.

And there was another reason why we should be especially attentive to our aging relative. For a number of years she had been providing the funds for the education of Ahmed, one of my older brothers who wanted to be a doctor and who was studying at the University of Algiers.

My father, I think, would have preferred that she divide among all of us the sum she was devoting to only one. But Aunt Zohra was ambitious and proud. She had decided that Ahmed was to have a brilliant career, and thus restore to our house something of its ancient greatness.

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MY father's family had often been rich, they had always been fighters, and for a long time they had held out as rebels.

There were Ben Ahmed Shelifs in each of the frequent insurrections in which our country has fought for independence against a series of very different enemies.

To mention only the modern period, the Turks had trouble with us first. Then the Christians, who thought that they could be done with our ill-will once and for all by building their powerful *borj*, Fort-National.

Fort-National, built in the year 1860 of the French era under the command of Maréchal Randon, contains no less than seventeen fortified bastions in its enclosure, each of them equipped with heavy cannon.

Perched at an elevation of three thousand feet, at the very spot where the fires of revolt were oftentimes lighted, Fort-National commands the arteries of travel in the lowlands and watches over the slightest suspicious movement

among our people. To us, for ten years, it was like bars to a lion. If he stills snarls, he cannot attack.

Then in 1871 the lion began to hear rumors which made him think that he could break his cage; he threw himself wildly on Fort-National, which was then garrisoned by only a few hundred men.

But though we had even succeeded in persuading Christian merchants to sell us powerful explosives, Fort-National held out, despite the small number of its defenders. In a two months' siege, we could not break through its defenses. All we did was to lose a great many men, and finally my grandfather, with most of his male relatives, was killed.

My father was only a child at the time, yet he could remember how the bodies were brought back to our *duar* at night, lying on litters of branches which the bearers carried at arm's length above their heads; he could remember the wild shriek with which the glorious remains were received by our mourning women, the red glare of the torches on the bloodstained faces of his mother and his sisters, who, as custom decreed, were tearing their cheeks with their fingernails. And when their fingernails were blunted, they took to the silver pins which are ordinarily used to secure the folds of robes.

Then the dead were buried fittingly, their faces turned toward the Holy City of Mecca, and the women ceased their sobbing. There were better things to do! And why should one weep long for those whose warrior spirit had assured them of a blissful immortality in Paradise?

Those who had survived were far more to be pitied. Already reduced in numbers, they were soon to see themselves deprived of their ancestral rights. For confiscation of the possessions of the Kabyle notables, chiefs of the revolted tribes, inexorably followed other measures of pacification.

So the Ben Ahmed Shelifs lost piece after piece of their land.

Soon the few plots that remained to us did not represent a hundredth part of the domains we had once owned.

As a result, there were many most difficult years, even though all our women devoted themselves to the plow, and the men who were left to the work of giving them children. For in such cases it is our tradition to leave neither a single inch of ground nor a single woman's womb unproductive. The young widows were married to the brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins, and other male relatives of the vanished heroes.

But the gold of the sorry grain, the blond heads of the sickly children, made the new poor richer by only a little hope. For the fields which had been left to us were not only small, they were also unproductive.

During this time, my father had increased in wisdom. Instead of stubbornly tilling a thankless soil, he decided to use it for pasture.

After that, all went well—and perhaps even a little more than well—for almost as many years as there are fingers on a man's two hands.

The flock thrived. My father was able to buy back a few grain fields, and even a few olive groves, from Christian colonists who were less skillful than he or less hard-working. He already saw himself restoring the old boundaries of his family's land, when the drought came. It attacked us no less grimly than the demon of war had done.

With cleverness and a certain amount of luck, you can sometimes emerge from war unscathed. But drought is a calamity against which the best men's courage and skill are unavailing. You cannot even say to a drought, "Stop! I surrender!"

Yet my father did his best to reduce our loss. The greater

part of our flock, having found a little pasturage under the shade of our trees, was still on its legs. Without waiting any longer for the sky to relent (though the *marabuts* always insisted that it would rain the following day, the only rain was the money which rained into their pockets) he looked for a buyer and found one.

This gentleman was buying up what was left of our flocks at half price, for the benefit of a French dealer who then had them shipped to the lush pastures of France.

Better to lose half one's wealth than all of it. My father decided to accept the man's offer. But, reflecting that in a time of general calamity no one could safely be trusted, he resolved to accompany his flock to the designated port of embarkation, which was many hours distant for a man traveling on foot.

He set out from the *duar* at night, and each of us confidently awaited his return, feeling certain that he would be able to extricate us from our difficulties. Yet, though he had traveled as fast as possible, when my father reached the port of embarkation, he saw—far on the horizon—the smoke of the last steamer which could have taken his flock and which was returning to Ceuta with empty holds.

He was told that a longshoreman's strike had broken out—which is to say a revolt on the part of humble toilers and fathers of families against those who regularly exploited them.

At other times, my father would doubtless have thought such a revolt admirable. But at the moment he too was poor, he too had dependents, and every minute of delay was a threat to the existence of his family.

So there he stood on the shore, watching for the ships to come back and hoping with all his heart that this latest manifestation of the eternal quarrel between the rich and the poor would speedily come to an end.

But the strike went on for almost a month, and most of our flock died.

So he had to content himself with selling their fleeces to dealers who took advantage of the disaster to pay a centime for what was worth a douro.\* Then he set out for our *duar*, his head hanging, for the small sum of money he was bringing did not even belong to him.

Counting on the sale of his flock, payment for which was to be made at the time of embarkation, he had borrowed a certain sum of money from a usurer from whom there was no hope of securing a delay.

So as soon as he got home, my father called his relatives together and explained our situation. Should we let his note be protested, at the risk of seeing our property sold and the family eternally ruined? Should we pay the usurer with what my father had brought home in his russet leather *jebira* even if some of the family should die of the privation which must inevitably result?

For, this time, we were really going hungry. Before long, we would be grinding up the bones of dead livestock, gnawing roots, devouring the hearts of thistles like donkeys, eating less in a week than we used to in a day, fighting like dogs to protect our minute share from the voracity of those who would gladly have fed their own bellies at the expense of the rest of us.

It is in a time of great calamity that people show their true worth. The Ben Ahmed Shelifs could face hunger as they had faced war, and the family council had heroism enough not to cry to my father:

"First let us have food!"

Only one member of the family suggested dilatory measures: we would pay part of the money to the usurer, we would keep the rest to last us until the next harvest. For in

\* A silver coin. Its value at the time was about one dollar.

the nearest city we could still find seed and provisions if we were willing to pay five or six times its value for anything that we bought.

But my father objected: If we paid only half of his debt to the usurer, the latter would still retain all his right to sue us in a very short time. So that such a half-measure, which would not entirely save us from starvation, would assuredly ruin us.

Then the old men fell silent, and my brother Ali rose, like the Angel of the Sacrifice.

Ali was the eldest of us all, the handsomest of my father's sons, for my father had begotten him in his own youth, at the height of his passion for my mother, when she had been as beautiful and as ardent as he.

First Ali respectfully saluted the gathering, men and women. (At this difficult juncture, the family council had tolerated the presence of a few women—the better ones, those who could pull a plow and handle a gun as well as a man).

Then he turned to my father and waited to be given the right to speak. And when my father had granted it, Ali said:

"Pardon me if I am so bold as to offer my opinion, but I believe there is a way for us to keep our land and our lives. . ."

"What way?" my father asked.

Ali lowered his eyes, but he went on:

"It is said that the French need soldiers. And since their women have not the courage to bear enough children, the French are recruiting at Tizi-Ouzou, and it seems that they pay a good big sum in advance if one is young and healthy and has wits enough to learn their drill."

There was a terrible silence. No one dared say Yes. No one could say No. Everyone had the frightful feeling that it was the only possible solution.

My mother chose to leave. Sobs were rising in her throat,



and it is not fitting that a woman who has had the honor to be admitted to the family council of men should risk disturbing their deliberations by her cries and her tears.

The following day, my father insisted upon going all the way to Tizi-Ouzou with his son, who was one of the first to appear before the board of *tubibs* and officers, and my father had no difficulty in finding witnesses who would testify that Ali had passed his eighteenth birthday, although he was really only sixteen at the time.

So he was enlisted under the simple name of Ali ben Ahmed, for it would have been too painful to my father to reveal that the youth was descended from a family which had never yet wholly submitted to France.

Then my father came back home, graver than ever, bringing the small sum which should permit us to hold out until harvest time and to remain alive at any cost.

According to him, it seemed that we no longer had the right to die, for death was too easy in comparison with what Ali had just done for us.

Thereafter it rained and rained, as a result of which Kabylia reaped a harvest of grain and oil and fruit so plentiful that in our *duar* and in many another there was no one who could remember any harvest to equal it. And there were some who died of indigestion after having almost perished of hunger.

At last we received a letter from Aunt Zohra, who had shown no sign of life for so many years that my father thought that she was dead or had cast us off. But she had only just learned, from some vague talk among the masseuses at a Moorish bath, that there was a famine in our district. In those days news traveled slowly. Tunis was several days' journey from our *duar*, even by railroad. And the French newspapers had not reported the famine. Even if they had, Aunt Zohra could not read.

She added that, if the news were true, she was prepared to send us whatever we might need, for in the years in which she had ceased to communicate with us she had become extremely rich.

This kind letter, which arrived too late, my father answered the first time he had an opportunity to go to the city and find a public scribe, because there was no one in our village who could write.

Thus Aunt Zohra learned of our precarious situation and of how, to save the family, my father's eldest son had been obliged to enlist for seven years. . . .

Soon after this exchange of letters, she came to visit us, accompanied by so many bags and boxes and bundles that a cart had to be found and sent to bring them from the station. And when they arrived at the village, she insisted upon distributing them that very evening, by the light of red and green Bengal-lights which she had also brought with her. It was a wonderful sight. She looked like an old *jinnna* (the *jinnas* are our fairies) who had appeared in Upper Kabylia simply to reward us for our pious pertinacity in continuing to live.

Her presents were of all sorts. The girls received ribbons and necklaces of glass beads. For the women there were serviceable lengths of cloth and silk scarfs. The boys, though they almost always went barefoot, received arch-supporters and stickpins. (Aunt Zohra, though she laughed at the Christians, adopted their fashions.) But sometimes useless things seem all the more precious. The men appeared to be thoroughly satisfied with their fantastic presents.

As for edibles, which made up the bulk of her large cargo, she had not forgotten to add a certain number of less useful but more tasty confections to her stock of staples.

*Rahat-lukum* is one of the finest of Tunisian delicacies. Aunt Zohra had brought a large quantity of it.

There was even a full case of the condiment which is manufactured in Dijon, France, and the grown-ups revelled in it to such a degree that even to this day certain ancients of our *duar* maliciously revive the memory of Aunt Zohra under the sobriquet of "The Mother of Mustard."

But that night, each present she handed out under the leaping colored flames was received by the blessings of the men and the shrill *yus-yus* of the women of our clan.

At a certain moment there was even a great scuffling in the bushes which clothed the sides of the ravine, and Aunt Zohra cried:

"It's only a hyena refusing to give up his place to a jackal!"

Everyone burst out laughing. But why should not the skulkers in the brush have been attracted by her brilliant show?

Good is sometimes rewarded in this world. Aunt Zohra's health was so much improved by this first visit of hers to Kabylia that from that time on she came to our *duar* as often she could—and always laden with presents.

They were welcome. For until the great war of 1914-1918, which restored a high value to the products of our African soil, there were still periods when we were in difficulties.

## ♦ 3 ♦

THE Jews circumcise their male offspring at birth. The Moslems prefer to wait until their sons are older. I was about eight years of age when I underwent the operation, which is always accompanied by a great feast in which relatives, friends, and certain others take part.

All through the preceding week my mother and Mariam, the girls in our family, and even the women in the neighboring houses had never stopped rolling grain in their hands for *kuskus*, cooking pancake-bread and pastries, and searching chests and trunks for the holiday garments which all self-respecting people don for such occasions.

Aunt Zohra had presented me with a magnificent costume. The full trousers were of turquoise-colored cloth, the pink velvet coat, braided with gold, opened over a vest of watered silk. My feet were shod in high boots of soft leather. The silk tassel of my tarboosh hung down to my shoulder. I must have looked splendid, but I could only judge by peering into

a copper platter, for there was not a single large mirror in our house.

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On another joyous day my brother Ali came home from Constantine to give us a chance to admire the new stripe on his sleeve.

Ali had developed. He carried his head high and his eyes looked at the world unflinchingly. He did not seem dissatisfied with his lot. His new rank would bring him an increase in pay. Perhaps he would even become a sergeant, if the great war that was being talked about so much should break out at last. Ali was one of those whose worth conquers bad luck. We had pitied him; now we envied him. He seemed more than capable of restoring its old luster, of adding new worth, to the once glorious name of Ben Ahmed Shelif. Even my father seemed to lose his old bitterness at the thought.

Two more years went by.

Until I reached the age of ten, I had never done anything but keep my father's sheep, play my flute, fight with other boys, and dream when I was alone. It seemed probable that I should also have to prepare myself to till the soil, while Lakdar, my youngest brother, would replace me as the family shepherd. And, but for Zina, it would never have occurred to me that my destiny might be different.

Zina was the daughter who had been born to Mariam during her first marriage, after which she had become my father's second wife. Although Zina and I had been brought up together and were used to thinking of ourselves as brother and sister, there was a more ardent, and perhaps a less pure, affection between us.

Zina was younger than I. She was the least beautiful and the most charming of our girls. She was like some precious jewel which is wrapped in a faded cloth, in some ordinary

garment, to save it from pillagers. God had not wanted her to be too pretty, and an illness in her childhood had even left her with her right arm slightly paralyzed. But her eyes were beautiful, her hair was unusually abundant, her walk was like a dance, her smile displayed teeth so small that you forgot that her mouth was too big, the way she had of holding her injured arm to her side and bending her neck a little made you think of a delicate dove. Her grace could transform anything into a lure.

She had even succeeded in compensating for the fate which had made her a cripple by teaching her left arm to render her the services which are normally performed by the right. It was a matter of pride with her to do more things, and to do them better, than girls who had the use of both hands. She wove and sewed. She could knead the pancakes which serve us for daily bread and the pastry which we eat on high holidays. Sometimes she even went to the spring for water, although it was hard to keep the jar steady on her head with only one arm. When he came in from the fields, my father found her waiting to help him out of his dusty clothes, to offer him cool water from the jug. She was the woman who always remembers to shoo away the flies which would trouble your rest.

Whenever I was in the house, we were together. She often came to join me while I tended our flock. Stretched out under a cedar which overlooked the countryside, we would play at dividing up the world. We gave each other shares of the earth, the sky, the mountains, and especially the clouds. There were not often many clouds. Zina said:

"If I were God, I would make more clouds every day, to delight people's eyes."

But two were enough.

"You take one; I'll take the other. . . ."

Hers would look like an animal, or a sea-coast . . . mine

like a man, or perhaps a ship. We would watch to see if the animal would overtake the man, or if the ship would make port. . . . Sometimes the ship would be transformed into a house, the sea-coast into smoke. Or we would drop the game for another.

On summer nights—our African sky would be loaded with stars, the scent of jasmine would fill the air around us—we would continue our celestial explorations.

Zina said: "When God lights all his lamps, it means that he is holding a great festival in Paradise. . . ."

My brothers and some other boys were scuffling and shouting on the road. They were playing war, and no one wanted to be on the Christian side. . . . They called me: "Ya-a-a-a Mu ra-a-a-ad. . . ."

I did not answer. . . . They must have thought that I was already in the house and asleep. . . . Zina put her head on my shoulder and stared up into the sky. Then Cirta snuggled between us.

Cirta was my own dog. Her name was the old barbarian name of the city of Constantine. She had been given to me as a new-born puppy by one of the troopers attached to the administrator of the mixed commune; it was he who had baptized her. I had brought her up as if she had been a baby. I had sacrificed my own food for her whenever it had been impossible to steal any. As a result, she had grown up to be the finest animal in our *duar*.

Kabyle dogs are long-legged and thin, with pointed muzzles like jackals, which they also resemble in their sandy color; and every village has its own famishing pack of them (can a community help feeding its animals badly when it does not always know how to feed its men?). Aside from their legendary voracity, the chief fault of our Kabyle dogs is the chief fault of women and children. They use their voices too much when there is no need to. But their voices

give warning of their presence, so that a man can be alert and ready to defend himself against them.

Cirta did not bark. She attacked immediately and would have strangled your man for you without giving him a chance to yell for help. She knew what I wanted if I only winked one eye or raised one eyebrow. If I could peacefully give myself up to dreams, fall asleep, or listen to the song of my reed flute, it was because Cirta tended my father's flock better than I could. Sheep are easy to drive, but goats are mad. With Cirta, they had to behave themselves.

My brothers envied me for owning such a useful dog. But, though they tried in every way to corrupt her, she never accepted anything from their hands without my permission.

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At this time I was beginning to compose my first songs for Zina, without even knowing if they were poetry. And it was those songs which made her decide that I was not to content myself with the obscure lot of a Kabyle peasant. At first I merely smiled when she said such things, although I was flattered that she should consider me worthy of a higher destiny. But what possible likelihood was there that her girlish dream would ever be realized?

Yet Zina had got it into her head that God would perform a miracle on my behalf. And I did not yet know how patient a woman can be, nor how a man's future can be influenced by a woman's obstinacy, by a will that daily, hourly, at every heartbeat, assails the ears of Him Who Is All-powerful, saying:

"Grant that it may come to pass!"

That same year, Aunt Zohra arrived in such poor health that we feared we should lose her. She had to be carried from the station to the *duar* on an improvised litter, made of branches and hides. She had just come from Vichy and



Lourdes. She had gone because she wanted to see for herself if there was any virtue in the waters which are reputed to cure most of the diseases to which the human frame is subject, and if there was any reality in the miracles which are said to be performed by Lella Miriam, the Blessed Mother of Sidna Aissa, the Lord Jesus of the Christians.

In Vichy Aunt Zohra had drunk copiously from every spring without consulting the *tubibs*, and her liver had soon protested. She had barely recovered before she set off for Lourdes, where she imperiously demanded to be dipped in the pool. The water, it seems, was icy, though the air was extremely warm. Then, on her way back, the old woman had been seized by a violent fever.

"I deserved what I got," she said. "A good Moslem should leave the Christians with their diseases and their remedies, their sins and their *marabuts*. Yet I have no regrets. All through my journey I kept learning something new. And at Vichy I even won some money at a very simple game based on numbers and colors. You choose black or red, or some number that appeals to you, someone calls, "Allez, roulez!" and then, even with just a little luck, you get back nearly ten douros for the one douro you staked."

But she was not able to tell us all these strange things until long after her arrival, when my mother, Mariam, and Zina had brought her back from the gates of death, each doing what she thought best.

Mariam put scorching things on her chest and back. My mother crouched beside her, holding her left hand in her own right hand, which was a way of transferring the health of her own vigorous body into the old woman's enfeebled frame.

As for Zina, she fanned her, changed her linen, moistened her feverish lips, and the rest of the time prayed to God for her recovery and told her stories.

Zina had a sweet voice, an ardent imagination, and an inexhaustible memory. She knew how to give a magical atmosphere to the stories she and I had made up together; she would add a speech, a fantastic character, another cloud. Aunt Zohra was pleased.

So, one day soon after she had recovered the use of her voice, she said to Zina:

"You have taken care of me as devotedly as Aziba could have done, the best and most beautiful of my daughters. And, what's more, you have made the latter part of my illness such a delightful time that I shall always remember it happily. . . ."

And, when Zina blushed at her great praise, she added:

"Praise is nothing if it is not followed by a recompense! Tell me, my beauty—would you like as many dresses as I have fingers on my two hands? . . . A gold watch that strikes the hours? . . . A box that sings? . . . But you are such a serious girl—perhaps you would rather have a sewing-machine?"

At each suggestion Zina shook her head, but with such charming embarrassment that no one could suppose her refusal was motivated by pride or disdain.

At last Aunt Zohra said:

"Since I can't think of anything that will please you, tell me yourself what you would like."

Then Zina raised her bowed head and cried:

"O my Aunt, for myself I need nothing. But I wish something for Mourad, my cousin."

"And what do you want for Mourad? A bicycle? No? . . . Then what?"

"Please send him to school when you have finished paying for his brother Ahmed's education. . . ."

"And why should your Mourad have an education?"

"Because he is far too talented to spend all his life here

tilling the soil. . . . And if you want proof of his talent . . . it was he who made up the stories I told you while you were ill!"

Aunt Zohra shook her head.

"Many days will have passed before I shall be able to give Mourad the benefit of the sum that I spend every year for Ahmed's education. And however intelligent your favorite may be, a man who has not learned to read and write before he grows up is most unlikely to make a success in a scholarly career."

The argument seemed unanswerable, and this time Zina said nothing. But some days later, resuming the conversation where she had been obliged to leave it off, she said:

"O my Aunt! do you know that the French have opened a school for Kabyles in the city, not far from here? . . . There is nothing to pay. . . . So Mourad could go there and begin learning to read and write, until later on when you will be able to give him the money to go to a great *medersa* (Moslem university)."

"Who told you? . . . What sort of a school is it? . . . Does a boy have to become a Christian to go there?"

"Oh, no. The woman who was telling us about it at the spring is a good Moslem. It is her brother's son who goes to the school. And now he is very happy there—though, to get him inside the door the first time they had to shout 'Arr'ha! . . . 'Arr'ha!' as if he were a balking donkey."

"I can't make head or tail of your story!"

"It's not a story. Listen. . . . The French school had been open for a long time, but none of our people would send a son to it for fear of something like a trap. . . . And the man in charge of it twiddled his thumbs in the desert and told himself that Madame France would soon get tired of paying him for doing nothing. So he went to see another Government official, who said to him:

“ ‘Don’t worry. Before long you will have as many pupils as your school can hold.’

“The next day a troop of cavalrymen surrounded several of our *duars* and herded all the fellah’s sons into the city. . . . Since the schoolmaster is very kind, they stayed on of their own free will. . . . And today, if one asks him politely, he will sometimes take in yet another ignoramus and transform him into a son of learning. . . . And there you are!”

Aunt Zohra made a face:

“Yes, I understand. . . . But will Mourad’s father be willing to ask the schoolmaster politely? . . . Well, I can always mention it to him!”

No sooner had Zina reported this conversation to me than my heart beat so fast it worried me. And one minute I was afraid my father would say Yes, and the next that he would say No, being torn between two opposite feelings—love of the thing one has always known, and the lure of the thing that is new.

Several days went by. . . . At last the time came when Aunt Zohra felt strong enough to face my father.

But he merely told her that he needed me to tend his flock, and that he would need me even more as soon as I was strong enough to plow.

“But what you earn from the soil is hardly worth mentioning,” said our elderly relative.

For the drought had been followed by a bad market, and the finest olive oil found no buyers and wheat barely paid for the cost of growing it. Even wine, which the Christians esteem so highly, fetched hardly twenty-five francs a hundred gallons, and to get that the grower had to transport it to the nearest railway station at his own expense, and the nearest station would often be miles from his vineyard.

When my father had patiently allowed Aunt Zohra to set forth her views, he retired into the brush to meditate. This

was his custom every time he was called upon, as head of the family, to solve one problem or another.

And when he came back, he said to me:

"O Son! I know that you are already aware of your Aunt's generosity and of the plans which she has made. I have been praying to God to clear my mind and to tell me if I can ask this thing for you without injuring my dignity as a Kabyle. . . . To this day, no one could say that the Ben Ahmed Shelifs have servilely kissed the feet of their conquerors. We have even taken up arms against them again, each time we could. . . . Now that is impossible for our Ali eats their bread. . . . And if they need his services, why should not I need theirs? . . . After all, we have a fair supply of laboring men hereabouts, and a man of letters may bring great honor to the family. . . . So I shall go and ask this schoolmaster to admit you to his school as soon as the summer is done . . . Look to it that he may never say you were not worthy of his pains . . . And whatever you are taught, strive to keep your faith in our God."

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Aunt Zohra *did* buy Zina a sewing-machine. But, to prevent the other women from saying that it was a work of deviltry and stirring up the men to destroy it, she got a well-known *marabut* to exorcise it in the name of Allah. After that, it was of the utmost use to all the *duar*.

## ♦ 4 ♦

NOW, morning and night for several years, I took the two-hours' walk between our *duar* and the town where the school was, carrying my books and notebooks, a piece of bread and a few dried figs in a *kufin*, which is our usual type of basket. If I dined more lavishly at night, it was because Zina set aside something out of her own portion for me. She also managed to feed my Cirta.

In the morning I often ran the whole distance. In the evening I was in less of a hurry, and as I was anxious to learn my lessons, I stopped from time to time, opened one of my books, read a sentence, and walked on repeating it over and over.

At last, seeing that I was studying so hard, Aunt Zohra gave me a bicycle, which made things much easier, except when the roads were blocked by snow. But at such times my master would let me sleep in his house. As time had gone

on, my family had formed a close friendship with this most generous of men.

His name was Émile Stiévenart and he came from northern France. He was not much fatter than Aunt Zohra and very little taller. Yet such authority radiated from him that he did not even have to raise his voice to win the respect and obedience of his pupils.

The Stiévenarts had seven children. By day, the father worked in the depths of a mine, the mother could hardly keep up with the housework, the washing, and the children's clothes which, it seems, were always clean and even nicely mended. The wonder was that the children were fed besides, and it was due to her too. For during much of the night she worked at her trade of stitching shoes, which made it possible for her to add something to her husband's pay of six francs a day.

Émile Stiévenart had eaten meat for the first time in his life on the day when he was admitted to Normal School, at the age of seventeen.

On top of all that, endless months of winter and a cloudy sky all the rest of the year. So he often told his pupils that, however poor they might be, they were less to be pitied than he had been at their age. For at least they had the benefit of miraculous horizons and a divine sun, whereas he had spent his childhood with a wall in front and a wall behind. And that lack of light, combined with hunger, had been worse than anything!

No one could believe him. How could we believe that a learned man, a son of our conquerors, had ever suffered such wretchedness! I could not understand it myself until once he explained it to me under somewhat exceptional circumstances.

My father had finally asked him to spend a few days of vacation with us.

Moslems do not like to be outdone by anyone in generosity, and so far it had been impossible to make the man to whom I owed so much accept the most trifling present: a pot of honey, a jar of oil, a woolen rug.

So he came to visit us, and it was during his visit that he spontaneously told me of the horrors and the poverty of his unhappy youth.

I was very young to be the recipient of such confidences from such a man, and usually he was rather silent and secretive.

But on this occasion, if he became talkative, it was because he had drunk too much. And that had been our fault entirely.

My father had heard that the best meal meant nothing to a Frenchman unless he was served plenty of wine with it. And because he wished my master's days with us to be perfectly happy, he asked a neighboring farmer—a descendant of Christians—to let him have a small barrel of wine in exchange for honey and oil. And when the barrel arrived he at once had it put in a cave which had the advantage of being cool and was at the same time at some distance from our house.

The Puritans of Islam insist that the Koranic commandment against fermented beverages forbids believers in the True Faith to bring even one drop under the paternal roof.

So, since it was summer, it was decided that we should eat our meals outdoors and thus avoid contaminating the house, even for a short time. It remained to discover who would undergo the degradation of serving the accursed liquid. Zina offered to be the one, saying calmly:

"O my Uncle and my Father!" (For her, he was both, since she was the child of his brother and he had later married her mother.) "If women are almost never admitted to



Paradise, and thus, should they displease God, risk much less than a boy, let it fall to me to fill this man's cup."

For she knew that if no one had offered to do it, I should have had to serve my master, whatever it might cost me later on.

All would have been well if Zina, carried away by her zeal, had not ceaselessly replenished our guest's glass. He, on his part, thinking that he would offend us by refusing, emptied it each time, wishing us unnumbered blessings.

The wine was strong and the day hot. As a result, at the end of his first meal with us, my master was obliged to lean on my arm in order to go and lie down in the shade of our huge cedars.

From there, we seemed to see the entire world. Before our eyes, and on to the distant ocean, stretched hills, and valleys, and plains whose every field was a different color—green, yellow, or tawny, according to the crop it bore. Over all hung a perfectly blue sky. Not a single cloud . . . hardly a breath of wind, and the rasping of cicadas which was like the immense vibration of space.

My master was lying on his back but he was not asleep. His arms flung wide, his eyes half-closed, he began talking as if in a nightmare, as if this sudden influx of warmth and joy, the sight of so much abundance, forced his heart and his liver at last to disgorge the excess of bitterness stored up in him by dark days, insufficient food, and the inhumanity of man.

He spoke simply, but so powerfully that each of his sentences raised an image whose shape I recognized though its color was unfamiliar. For if in the childhood from which I had but just emerged I too had experienced cold and hunger and the egotism of the great and the brutality of the strong, God had at least permitted me to be born in the most beauti-

ful country on earth, and He had also put in my heart the resignation of Islam.

He alone is all-powerful. One day He had taken pity on my master, too, on this pure-hearted Christian. Then He had performed a miracle for him, using a cotton-goods salesman as the intermediary.

The salesman was a cousin of the Stiévenarts, who had had the luck to spend his term of military service at Medea. And when he returned to France and to civilian life, he had not rested until he had found a way to return to Algeria, as an employee of a great cotton firm in Roubaix, which paid him very well.

And each time he returned to France he went to see his relatives, and he talked to them about the beauties of Africa in such glowing terms that he finally fired young Émile Stiévenart with a desire to go there himself.

At this point in his narrative, my master half opened his eyes, looked about him, and then closed his eyes again. But this time he went to sleep.

The earth was almost dark when he awoke and said:

"I cannot remember whether I have been dreaming that I confessed to you, or whether I did really. In any case, I have a terrible headache, which is doubtless due to your wine. You would be doing me a favor if you could arrange things so that I won't have to drink any more of it at dinner. As a matter of fact I usually drink water with my meals."

I at once communicated our guest's wish to my father. And that evening and the next day and the following days and every other time that Émile Stiévenart honored us with a visit, he was allowed to drink from the water-jug, like ourselves.

And so the people of our *duar* learned that a man can be a Christian without necessarily being a drunkard.

As for the wine barrel, which no one was supposed to

touch, it was found to be mysteriously empty some time later when the colonist who had sent it wanted it back.

And Zina, who at first had been perfectly certain that she had closed the spiggot, later became less positive. The fact is that the spiggot was open when the colonist's men came for the barrel. Yet my father thought it strange that she could have been so stupid. It was not like her.

I may as well admit that certain young men of the *duar* had risked the divine malediction and drunk the wine which my master had refused. Most of them got off with nothing worse than a bad headache, like my master. But the boldest of them had kept his lips to the spiggot for so long that he had afterwards slept through a whole night and day in the brush. As a result of which his family was setting out to look for him when he reappeared, vomiting and insisting that he was suffering from an attack of indigestion.

All the young people in our *duar*, who knew the whole story, were careful not to breathe a word of it to our elders. And Zina preferred being thought careless to betraying the secret. For each of the young criminals had the worst to fear if the elders of the *Jemma* should ever learn of this terrible infraction of the law of the Koran.

Later on, in the city, I knew several *kaid*s, and even a few *marabuts*, who had less respect for the law and did not hesitate to drink wine and spirits, though they always referred to them as "spring water."

But in those days in the country districts of Kabylia people were still profoundly innocent, and the older people never even dreamed that certain things could some day cease to be what they had always been.

## ♦ 5 ♦

AUNT ZOHRA, when she had undertaken to pay for my brother Ahmed's education, had said:

"Since I am always ailing, there ought to be a *tubib* in the family!"

So Ahmed had become a student of medicine.

Referring to me, she now said:

"One day the Ben Ahmed Shelifs may need one who can defend the interests of the clan in words, as his brother will be able to cure their bodies . . . Mourad! You shall be a lawyer, and you shall set out for the Grand Lycée in Algiers as soon as Ahmed has finished his studies."

God had ordained differently.

In the first place, Ahmed failed several of his examinations and it was a long time before he received his degree.

Then the miraculous Aziba's husband was fool enough to speculate. He ruined himself, and the old lady had to refloat

him. Had he not given her favorite daughter seven children who must be fed?

So there was no longer any question of her paying for a long course of study for me.

Should I have to go back to the fields? It would not have been such a bad thing to go plowing with enough knowledge in one's head to keep one amused through the long, crawling days of monotonous labor. But people never seem to think that one can be educated and a laborer, and so when I emerged victorious from the examinations for my primary school certificate, my father was glad to accept my master's offer to prepare me for a career as a primary-school teacher himself.

He did it in a very short time, and in order to teach me more rapidly he even devoted a part of his vacations to me, spending them at our *duar* and always keeping himself occupied in one way or another.

He had no equal at repairing old things—which we usually make no effort to save—and at making new ones out of nothing.

He was fond of music, too, and had a fine voice. On summer evenings he would gather the children of the *duar* around him, and they were soon able to sing “Le P’tit Quinquin,” which is a famous popular song from northern France.

The disinterested affection of such a man, the respect which he had no hesitation in showing for the best of us, were more than a recompense for certain small humiliations inflicted by other people who were either ignorant or tactless.

He always treated us as his equals, sometimes even as his superiors. If at such times we thought that his courtesy made him exaggerate, it did our hearts no less good.

And the men of our *duar*, after having at first looked on him askance or—what was worse—pretended to ignore his

presence entirely (their eyes moved over him without pausing, as if he were something unclean), now stopped to greet him:

"Yaaaa. . . Sidi Stiv-nart, you are well?"

"Who wouldn't be well in this place?"

"You are happy?"

"I am always happy when I am among you."

After which the man who had greeted him could do no less than pray that the Creator of All Things would lay His Hand of Benediction upon him.

My master answered by a sentence from the Holy Book. He often read the Koran and gladly obeyed its precepts—for example in the case of the Fast of Ramadan—which I was now performing, as befitted a boy who was no longer a child.

Thirty days of abstinence are not too much in such a climate as ours to compensate for the excesses of the rest of the year, and my master was a great eater, no doubt to make up for the penury of his early life.

Food was very cheap in Kabylia in those days. A dozen eggs cost five centimes, a pair of chickens one franc, olive oil a douro a jar. As for fruits, they were to be had for nothing.

So my master, whose lodging, light, and heat were furnished by the government, lived like a *kaid* while spending almost nothing, which permitted him to send frequent money-orders to one of his sisters in France who had a number of children.

He regretted that his father and mother had died before they could share in this abundance, and that his sister seemed not to understand how happy a thing life here was.

She was always urging him to return to their native land, whereas he, on the contrary, kept asking her to send him one of his nephews to bring up in light and joy. He wanted this so much that, one day, he sent her money for the boy's fare and an outfit. But she informed him by return mail that

she had put the money in the savings bank and that she had no idea of parting from her son to send him to such a country. . . . An unmistakable horror was apparent beneath her polite phrases:

"Thank God! we have not sunk so low. There is still bread in France for my poor child to eat!"

The letter shook in my master's hands. He crumpled it into a ball and angrily threw it away. Then, becoming calmer, he told me sadly that such a letter revealed not only the state of mind of a stupid and timorous woman, but also the total ignorance of the French people in regard to the colonies. He added:

"So much the worse for them! Mourad, you shall be my son!"

After that, though he still sent a money order now and again, he no longer answered his sister's letters. And thenceforth, when he was not visiting us, it was because I was visiting him.

Even on my bicycle, my constant trips back and forth between the town and our *duar* made me lose too much time. So he took me to board with him.

This great change I did not find difficult.

Outside of my study hours, my master left me entirely free, and he had even allowed me to bring my Cirta to live in his house.

It is true that it would have been almost impossible to do otherwise. If I left her for more than a day, she refused food and would have let herself die of hunger.

Each time that Zina saw us leave the *duar* together, she said:

"You are lucky to be a dog. If you were only a woman, you'd have to stay here."

For the most charming of all girls led a dreary life when I was away. Girls have to be shut up as soon as they seem

able to bear children, and Zina had become a woman while I was becoming a teacher.

So it was to be feared that they would want to find her a husband before I was in a position to marry her myself.

But though Zina was nubile, she still looked like a little girl, and she had neither the great beauty which immediately enchants those matrons who are always hunting a wife for a son or brother or nephew or cousin, nor the sort of robust health which makes a woman valuable because she can bear numerous children and work in the fields.

In addition, to avoid attracting anyone's attention, she pretended that her arm hurt her and no longer went to the spring for water.

Yet that was one of the few chances she had left to get out of the house, and time at the spring passes merrily because there is always someone to gossip with.

Time would have begun to hang very heavy on her hands if my master had not obtained my father's permission to teach her to read. She learned very rapidly. It did not take her long to learn to write either, though she had to hold her pen in her left hand. But she had trained it to do what is usually expected of the right. And, after all, if she had only one hand, she had two instructors instead of only one.

The first and the better one, my master, taught her seriously each morning. And the second—myself—managed, in spite of certain distractions, to make her go over her morning's lesson in the afternoon. Thus we were always together. It was a delicious summer in every way.

There was no rain until the end of September, yet the springs did not dry up and the heat was bearable. Not many south winds, and frequent cooling breezes. Furthermore, there was a good market for our crops and food was plentiful.

And, though I spent my days in innocent enjoyment with Zina, I went every night to the cave which had once con-



cealed the barrel of wine we had bought for my master. I went there to meet a woman who was passionate and whose husband was away from the *duar*.

She had passed her twentieth birthday—at which age our women who work in the fields are no longer in their first youth—but in the darkness of the cave that did not show, and she was utterly unmercenary.

The only difficulty was that after a time she appeared to think that I might love her enough to marry her some day, if her husband should finally get around to dying, as it seems a witch had promised her he would do.

Women muddle up everything. The fact that a man likes the feel of a woman's skin is not going to make him marry her at that age, especially when he is engaged to someone else. I told her so as politely as possible, but it was something she had to know. Among other things, I didn't want her husband, who was a fine fellow and a hard worker, to end his days by poison as soon as he came home.

After that she came to meet me less regularly, and found means to let Zina know something of our doings in the cave. In consequence I had a hard time making Zina understand that decency is not the same thing for a man as for a woman and that boys are sometimes faithful in their minds but never in their bodies.

I should have thought that she was more sensible and more intelligent. From this incident I learned that even law and custom never quite succeed in subjugating woman's possessive instinct.

Then the woman whom Zina mistakenly thought to be her rival left the *duar* to join her husband elsewhere.

Though her departure was a great relief to me in one respect, in another I found it extremely trying. . . . I had acquired the habit of women, and now I felt an urgent need for them.

Luckily I soon found another, much younger than the first, but demanding too, though in a different way. On the pretext that she was a widow, she made me give her presents of food from time to time, and these I had to steal from my father's house. My levies were noticed after a time and I had to put the blame on Cirta, who was punished in my stead and lost my father's esteem.

This time Zina suspected nothing. The delights of reading temporarily obliterated her worry about my fidelity. My master had been so kind as to give her a big book of colored pictures, and every time she had a free minute she spelled out the captions. Now, in a sense, it was she who was unfaithful to me, so great was her love for reading and study. It did not make me jealous. But the gossips of our *duar* were soon predicting that the daughter and niece of Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif would be harder to marry off than an epileptic or a hunchback. Who, indeed, would want to marry a creature as proud as the devil, who said that she could instantly decipher signs forever incomprehensible to her husband and the majority of decent folk!

Good and Evil often walk cheek by jowl.

I began to hope that the jealousy of these old fools would be more effective than any stratagem that I could devise to keep Zina unmarried until the still distant day when I should be able to marry her myself.

## ♦ 6 ♦

THE year 1912 of the Christian era was another good year for our house.

My brother Ali, who had not been able to come home for a long time because of the serious wounds he had received in the Morocco campaign, returned to show us his sergeant's stripes and his Military Medal.

The pride and satisfaction which resulted for my father were needed to make him forget the troubles his other son was causing him.

Ahmed, after receiving his M.D., had refused to settle in Kabylia.

We had not even seen him again. He had simply written that he was not stupid enough to spend his life vegetating in the *bled* when, if he remained where he was, he would one day be a rich man.

My father let him know that he would not encumber the family estate in order to furnish him with the sum he would need to set himself up elsewhere, and that he could no

longer count on Aunt Zohra, who had not yet succeeded in reestablishing her daughter's husband.

After that Ahmed stopped writing to us, and my father forbade us to mention his name. My mother wept in secret, greatly fearing that her second son was living in want.

But I had better return to the best member of our family.

My brother Ali, despite his many well-earned honors, remained modest, affectionate, and obliging. He had brought our mother a Moroccan jewel, which he must have appropriated after some battle. For *razzia* is an integral part of every war, and in this respect the Africans only follow a tradition which runs from the ancients to the great Napoleon.

The jewel in question was a very beautiful one—weighty, and encrusted with green and red stones. My mother wore it for the rest of her days, hung around her neck on a silk cord.

When Ali gave it to her, she blushed like a little girl and, for a moment, did not know whether to laugh or cry. She did both, and clasped Ali to her bosom. She was proud of this son whom she loved with all her heart and who brought her nothing but joy, and even happiness, as long as he lived.

It was natural therefore for her to wish that he should have children to carry on his good looks, his fine qualities, and his strength. And that is why, as soon as he could walk without crutches, she determined to find him a wife.

Ali, on the other hand, seemed rather to prefer freedom, to want to enjoy his life which had been so miraculously preserved. He found few women who would say No to him, in our *duar* or in those near-by. After he recovered the use of his legs he often borrowed my bicycle of an evening and did not return until dawn.

So he protested to my mother that a career of soldiering, which he wished to continue as long as possible, was not particularly compatible with being the father of a family.

"Ah!" said she, "at that rate the Ben Ahmed Shelifs, who have always been good fighters, would never have let you be born."

He could find no answer to that. She added:

"What have you to be afraid of? Now that poverty has abandoned us and I no longer work in the fields, I promise you that during your absences your wife will be guarded in the best and only way—that is, by another woman old enough to see through a young woman's stratagems and interested enough in the family honor to be immune to any of those considerations of personal gain to which old women are too often susceptible."

She kept her promise, and my brother's wife, even if she had wanted to (and whether she did or not, no one will ever know), even if she had been wiler than the wiliest of all the wily women in the world, would literally never have found herself free for even the very short time it would take for some man other than her husband to make her pregnant.

For my mother, who slept hardly at all, always went to bed at her side, far from any exit such as a door or window, and tied to her, wrist to wrist, by a cord. And when sometimes a pressing need obliged the young woman to go outdoors, my mother never failed to follow her, even at midnight and even in the worst weather.

During the day, she saw to it that her son's wife never went out of eyeshot.

She trusted no one but Mariam enough to leave her watch over Ali's wife in her place when she herself was obliged to serve my father or to sleep with him. On such occasions, Mariam was to follow the established ritual—that is, to keep her charge within eyeshot by day and to tie herself to her at night.

Thus in old times were queens guarded in Spain, and the wives of sultans in our country. Thus should men less proud

and less rich be able to guard their own. So great is the danger that they too will some day feel the need for change which so often troubles us who are men.

The marriage of our Ali and Ayesha took place in September. The wedding festivities continued, as our custom is, for three days and nights, and during that time we did our utmost to please our guests, among whom there were several people of importance, including one of my brother's officers and the Administrator of the mixed commune. They had both made it a point to honor a hero of whom France might have need again.

The Lieutenant was a very gay and very forthright young fellow, with eyes which made people like him. And he vehemently told anyone who would listen how Ali had saved his life in Morocco.

But the Administrator was another matter altogether, though he too wore a uniform and even more stripes than the Lieutenant. So far, he had frequently embarrassed us by his perpetual surveillance, and our feeling for him was more suspicious than friendly.

However, we felt flattered that he had gone to the trouble of coming; there are contradictions in every heart, and Moslems are no more inaccessible to vanity than the rest of mankind.

He was an enormously tall, enormously bulky man, with the appetite of a wolf. He was reputed to be as fond of women as he was of food, and as soon as the question of receiving him had come up, the elders of the *Jemma* assembled to deliberate and to find some means of satisfying the desires of such a prominent man without exposing the virtue of their women to profanation.

A certain Lunes, who was said to be uncommonly ardent and who, despite his three wives, frequently went to the city to experiment with other women, found the solution for our

problem. It was to send to the city for some *walad-nails*. They are half dancers and half courtesans; and better that the lion should batten on a corpse than on young lambs.

When Lunes had finished setting forth his proposal to the *Jemma*, my father objected that when an element of corruption is introduced into a plot of ground or into a body, it is impossible to foresee what ravages the said corruption will afterwards make in the more or less immediate surroundings of the said plot of ground or the said body.

He was remembering the cask of wine which, intended to quench the thirst of a Christian, had ended by making several Moslems drunk.

The other sages replied that it has always been a tradition among us to tolerate the presence of daughters of sin in the most virtuous houses during the celebration of family festivals, that no ill-consequences had ever resulted, and furthermore that no one in the *duar* except the present company would know what immoral acts these dancers were expected to commit or not to commit with the Administrator, according to his good pleasure.

And if *I* knew, it was because I was listening behind the door.

My father therefore assented and remained for the rest of the discussion, to give his advice as to the best way to apply a measure of which he disapproved in principle.

The next question concerned the number of *walad-nails* it would be proper to offer a man whose potency was legendary.

One was not enough, valorous as she might be. And, above all, one would look stingy.

With two, he could have a choice.

Three would be even better, and my father was of the opinion that our munificence should extend to three, which is also supposed to be a lucky number in magic.

As for who could best go to choose the charmers, Lunes was obviously indicated by his frequent relations with them, and perhaps he would be able to obtain their services for us at a somewhat less ruinous figure.

Whereupon I had to hurry away for fear of being caught, and also to tell all I had heard to him whom I regarded as the best of my Berber companions.

His name was Abd-el-Kader—despite which glorious patronymic he had for the moment, and indeed for all his life, to content himself with remaining a humble tiller of the soil, as I had come near to doing.

Abd-el-Kader, when I had reported the speeches and the intentions of the *Jemma's* sages to him, immediately said:

"We can put ourselves down as fools, you and I, if we don't find some way to get our share of at least one of the beauties!"

At first I thought it would be impossible. But Abd-el-Kader shrank at nothing. He was as big and strong as a bull, and daring in proportion. His strength was even reflected in his face, in a sort of brutal beauty which I have since noticed in certain American movie actors.

Furthermore, Abd-el-Kader had been granted the *baraka*, which is to say the gift of luck. So I decided to join him in planning a way of bringing the enterprise to a successful conclusion.

The three *walad-nails* could not come until the second day of the wedding festivities; they had certain previous engagements to keep. Nor was the Administrator free until the same day.

The three were extremely well dressed and plentifully decked with jewelry. Which proved that they were not at the beginning of their profitable careers. But what such women lose in freshness they gain in skill. In greediness too.

When they had danced a little, they withdrew for a time,



amid a concert of praise. Lunes had conceived the idea of arranging this sort of intermission in order to give the Administrator a first opportunity to speak to them.

We had quartered them in the little house in which we always put our illustrious guests. This house, as I have already said, was at some little distance from ours, and consequently from the day's festivities and from the eyes of the indiscreet. So Lunes, as soon as he had escorted the dancers to their quarters, hurried back to explain to the Administrator that they were awaiting his pleasure.

"I shall be happy to go and congratulate them later on," the Administrator said, "but there is no hurry."

For he had eaten enormously, and he was no longer in his first youth. Whereupon Abd-el-Kader whispered to me:

"*Fissa* (quick)! . . . This is our chance!"

Lunes had locked the dancers in. But locks are like women: they can be opened by more than one key. Expecting something of this sort, I had on the previous evening collected every key I could lay hands on in the *duar*.

However, I had not been able to try out my keys in advance. They had to be tried now, one after the other . . . Whereupon Abd-el-Kader, finding that I was taking too long, grabbed my keys, took one at random, put it in . . . it was the right key . . . (Was I wrong when I said that Luck favored him!) Then he slipped through the door and, before shutting it in my face, ordered:

"If you see Lunes or the Frenchman coming, or both of them, all you need do is whistle, like a starling!"

I knew my Abd-el-Kader well enough to be sure that, if no one came, he would leave me outside all night! So when I calculated that he had had more than time enough to take his pleasure, I imitated the whistle we had agreed upon. He responded at once, stepped outside the door, looked down the path, saw no one, and muttered:

"Where are they?"

But I, instead of wasting my time answering him, was already in the little house . . .

Afterwards, we ate like wolves, and then went to lie down far from the festival, in the shade of the huge cedars.

Cirta (as stuffed as a Kabyle dog can be) was already there, stretched out beside my master, who was resting and smoking. He had spent a great deal of energy helping us to receive so many people, and he had made a particular point of showing his esteem for us before the Christians and especially the Administrator.

From the *duar*, the noise of the festivities reached us where we rested, and thus we could continue to follow its course.

First there was gun-fire. That was for the fantasia\* . . . Then a period of silence . . . Then piercing music. The snakecharmer was making his serpents and vipers dance . . . Then shouts, *yus-yus*, applause. It seemed likely that the *walad-nails* were preparing to entertain the company chastely again. Whereupon Abd-el-Kader moved close to me and began to describe our adventure in such terms that I suddenly felt embarrassed to have had a share in it.

There are things which everyone does but which no one talks about—at least in our country, where men are modest.

Over his embarrassingly dull and unbearably vulgar words hung a miraculous night.

I do not know how long he would have gone on nauseating me if sleep had not stopped his mouth.

I soon fell asleep in turn, and I awoke purified.

After a while, my master began reciting poems, as if in a dream.

Listening to them, I soon felt such an intoxication that I dared in my turn recite certain things which only Zina had ever heard.

\* A mimic cavalry charge.

If I murmured them that night, it was like the murmuring of a stream, which cannot help laughing over its bed of stones when everything around it is too beautiful.

In the *duar* all sounds had long since ceased . . . Dawn rose over the peaks of the world. There is one particularly beautiful peak which we call "The Rose of the Cheek," because at daybreak it takes on the color of a cheek tinted by dawn. My master and I could not but fall silent, the better to absorb the beauty that was spread before our eyes . . . Cirta approached and licked our hands . . . Abd-el-Kader was still asleep.

I shall remember my brother's wedding all my life.

As for the Administrator, he had made a sad mistake in waiting so long before going to present his compliments to the three beauties. For when, having digested his dinner, he was ready to visit them, a trooper arrived with a message which made it impossible. A fire had broken out somewhere and his presence was necessary. He instantly mounted his horse and took leave of us with regret.

Two weeks later, I too had to return to serious work . . . it was a decisive year for my future.

Just before the next year's summer vacation, thanks to the skill and patience of my master, I was admitted to the Normal School.

My life was to follow new paths, while Ayesha gave birth to Ali's first son. Ali had rejoined his regiment some months earlier.

P A R T

♦ 2 ♦



## ♦ 7 ♦

AT the end of September 1913 I boarded a train to go to Algiers. I was bound for the Normal School at La Bouzaréa, which is close to the city.

I had still a week of freedom before classes began and I meant to use it to explore the city and pay a visit to my brother Dr. Ahmed ben Ahmed Shelif.

The evening before I set out, I had said good-by to my relatives and, to dry Zina's tears, had promised to write to her often. As for Cirta, it was settled that she should remain with my master unless I should find it possible to have her somewhere near me.

I set out bearing a quite voluminous pack mostly filled with presents intended for my future masters. There was a sack of figs, pottery vessels, and a woolen tapestry.

My wardrobe was less bulky, and I wore the greater part of it. My traveling clothes consisted of an orange-colored *sarwal* (full pleated trousers in the native style) and a brown

coat made of the finest woolen frieze that any woman of Kabylia had ever woven.

As for my shirt, my father had bought it from one of the wandering merchants who frequent the market of Azazga. It was as yellow as saffron. I had another, too, which was as green as the grass in the *kufin* which served me as a valise.

Over my arm I also carried the old woolen burnoose in which I had so often slept outdoors. When I used it for that purpose I always folded one corner of it over my eyelids, as a precaution against ophthalmia, which is constantly to be feared in our climate. It was made of a rough wool which had yellowed with age, and it was so big that it could have been put up like a tent and sheltered several people at once.

My father had it from his father, who himself had it from an ancestor who lived during the period when the Kabyles still believed that they could regain their freedom by fighting for it.

For those who knew nothing about it, it must have been a rather dirty piece of cloth which smelled of mutton fat, high olive oil, and carobs. For me, it held in its folds certain traces of gunpowder, a hole made by a bullet, and the magic power of arousing eternal ideas of race and family. Wrapped in it, I had dreamed great dreams and sometimes recovered my health. When one has a fever, the best thing to do is to wrap oneself in good wool and sweat it out.

The train trip was rather tiring. I was traveling among natives in humble circumstances, and my compartment was crowded with people, sacks of grain, chickens in cages, jugs filled with cold water. Yet I could have sat down if, just before the train started, the two young and veiled Mooresses had not appeared—escorted by an old woman, as decency demands, and encumbered by several infants.

So I had to ride in the corridor, but that gave me a better chance to admire the landscape. Everything was new to me.

It was the first time I had taken a train, and we were traveling at least thirty miles an hour, which seemed to me a prodigious speed compared with the trot of a mule or even with the galloping of a horse.

We frequently stopped at tiny stations to pretend to give yet more people a chance to get into cars already overloaded. Each time, however, some did manage to get aboard, and those of the natives who could not force their way in dropped back on the platform to wait for another train, that evening or the next day. Despite the stops, the train reached its goal before nightfall.

The railway station of Algiers is at sea level and is situated on the harbor, which, already of some consequence at that period, was to be prodigiously enlarged during the next twenty years and to undergo various changes. But at that time the elevators, in their concrete shafts, which now connect the station with the French town, had not been built and I had to climb the many steps of a stone stairway choked with passengers going up and down, with vendors of fried sardines and cold lemonade and picture postcards, and all the way I was fighting with a mob of porters who were trying to lay hands on my numerous pieces of baggage against my will.

When I set foot on the boulevard which overlooks the ocean, I had finally succeeded in getting rid of the porters without leaving any of my possessions in their clutches. To recover my breath, I first looked at the beauty of the harbor, then, turning my back to it, I was gripped by another sight which I found much more surprising. For I had already, on several occasions, had a chance to admire the sea elsewhere, whereas I had never before seen so many vehicles and people together at the same time.

You would have thought that all the automobiles in Algeria had arranged to meet that evening on that particular



boulevard. So many passed, even in a single minute, that it was impossible for me to count them on the fingers of my two hands.

Most of them were open, so one could enjoy looking at the Christian women who sat in them and appeared to be proud of their painted faces and the ridiculous big hats with long feathers which they had such difficulty holding on their heads with both hands.

Besides these luxurious cars, open carriages, streetcars, and pedestrians, Christian and Moslem, crossed and recrossed in the street and on the sidewalks.

Yet it was not a holiday . . . So it seemed that in this city there was always a bustle and animation such as we find at home only on extraordinary occasions and which even then is accompanied by much less noise. For though the ceaseless and complicated movement was stupefying in itself, what can I say of the noises that went with it?

Every vehicle cried "Look out!" in a different key.

The streetcar bells dominated the bass, but in the upper register the trumpets of the Maltese milkmen far outdid those of the vendors of pastries, peanuts, ice-cream and coco-nuts, though these easily overwhelmed the feeble tinkling of bicycle bells.

Each make of automobile also had its personal note, which was further modified by the artistic interpretation of the man at the wheel. Some of these daring virtuosos on the Klaxon even succeeded in dominating the entire orchestra—as I had once seen a great operatic tenor do at the theater in Constantine when my master had taken me there. But here it was an even less enduring triumph, for the virtuoso was soon swallowed by the horizon.

The choir of pedestrians tried in vain to join in this vast cacophony. Some brayed like donkeys, hoping to make them-

selves understood. The wisest preferred to converse in pantomime, using their eyes and their hands.

Now and again my ears received a vague burst of something which tried to be harmonious, which must be some sort of music.

Fortunately, the wind was quiet and the sea serene. Yet my heart was afraid.

What had brought me, so far from home, to such a city? Was this immense and hellish noise the prelude to what my life in the Christian world would be?

Before I could find an answer to my question, I must make my way across that river of machines. . . .

After several fruitless attempts, I flung myself and my baggage into the flood of vehicles and, having arrived safe and sound on the other side of the boulevard, I took a street which seemed comparatively deserted and almost silent. Stepping up to the first Moslem I saw, I performed the customary salutations and then asked him if he could tell me the way to the Place du Gouvernement. He put out his arm and said, with a smile:

"Follow this street, straight ahead!"

Finding him so good-natured, I dared to go on:

Did he by any chance know the Hôtel des Bains et de la Colonie, which I had been told was reasonable, and respectable, and not far from the square I had named?

This time he really laughed:

"Do I know it? I do indeed! I go there every time I have the itch."

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It was true that the Hôtel des Bains et de la Colonie received you with powerful fumes of sulphur and even of barège. Not only victims of the itch but also the arthritics in the colony went there to be cured.

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The architecture was intended to be Moorish. You entered by a vestibule paved with bad copies of antique tiles and decorated with dusty palms. At the end of the vestibule a glass cage imprisoned a woman who was too blonde, too pink, and above all too stiff—the result of a collar armed with whalebone and no doubt of a corset too.

She seemed incapable of making more than three or four different movements: raising her eyes, smiling, dropping her eyes again, writing your name in the register, ringing for someone to take your baggage. Turning her head or bending were quite out of the question.

When you had finished with this personage, whose name was Mademoiselle Hermine, you entered a patio. Tradition demanded that there should be a fountain in the middle of it. But here the marble basin was dominated by a bronze negress holding a gas luster in her hands. The accommodations for travelers were on the second floor. The rooms were lighted only from this inner court, and the perpetual vapor from the baths filled them with an unpleasant dampness and—because of the sulphur—a horrible stench of rotten eggs.

Observing this, I gathered up my courage and asked the girl who was escorting me—her name was Marie—whether there wasn't some room on an upper floor with a view of the sea.

She said Yes, and called another maid. The latter was a Mooress named Fatima.

At first I thought it was strange that, of two women doomed to menial tasks, one should bear the name of the mother of the Lord Jesus and the other the even more glorious name of the mother of our Prophet. I thought it must be an exceptional case. But I soon noticed that all the female servants in the city were called by these names. Just as all male servants were called Mohammed, which is the name of our Prophet.

They are easy names to remember and to pronounce, and Christians often put their desire for their own comfort before a proper reverence for greatness.

Fatima was much older than Marie and could show her face unveiled without any risk of troubling a man. Her teeth were gone, her nose touched her chin, but her eyes were still brilliant and her tongue was perfectly nimble.

Following her, I reached the terrace-roof of the building. But not a thing was to be seen, for a huge wash suspended on clotheslines completely hid the horizon. I had to follow Fatima through a labyrinth of sheets, table-cloths, napkins, and dish-towels, while she explained to me that, in addition to curing the itch, the Hôtel des Bains et de la Colonie washed the table and bed linen for all the other big hotels and restaurants in the French town. At this point in her discourse, she stopped, turned to me, winked one eye, and giggled:

"THEY say that we are dirty, and THEY wipe their mouths with napkins that have been washed in water in which everyone had dipped his arse!"

We had reached a little building which stood beside the wash-house. She opened a door.

"Here you are!"

The room seemed more like a cabin on a ship, it was so small; and around it the wash flapped like sails. Even the furniture seemed to have gone through a storm. Every piece had something missing.

I was so disappointed that I stayed inside no longer than necessary. But at least my things would be safe from thieves there.

Once in the street I felt hungry and went into an Arab cook-shop. My dinner, which was not good because the ingredients were not fresh, cost me all of fifteen centimes. When I had finished I wondered where to go. I had my

brother Ahmed's address in my pocket, but I was not sure of the reception he would give me, and at such a late hour you do not go to call on someone who may not be heartily glad to see you.

I saw a mosque . . . I entered . . . When I came out, my heart was a little less heavy . . . Now bright lights illuminated the French town; indeed, in certain squares you would have thought it was daylight . . . I decided to walk until bedtime . . . The Kasbah was near-by . . . I approached it by a steep, narrow, and dark alley, which at once suited me better than the most brilliantly lighted boulevard in the French town.

There were houses whose upper stories almost met across the street and completely hid the sky. But not all: here and there a star managed to shine down between them, miraculously lighting me on. . . .

Veiled women passed silently, carrying a sleeping child on one shoulder while others trotted after them.

Little donkeys, flanked by enormous bales, trotted too. One donkey-driver greeted me in my native tongue as he passed.

"O brother, how did you know who I am?"

"It will be more than a day before your burnoose loses the odor of our mountains!"

I climbed, I wound, I retraced my steps.

In a street which was wider but scarcely less dark an embroiderer was working by the light of a kerosene lamp. A sewing-machine and a mattress on a mat were all the furniture he had . . . On a small shelf there was a bird in a gilded cage, a pot of sweet basil, and a pot of geraniums . . . The lamp smoked badly . . . Now and again the embroiderer, who was not a young man and who seemed tired, stopped drawing his needle, lowered the lampwick with a sigh, and then looked at the plant, the flower, and the bird and went back to work with something like a smile.

It seems like nothing when I tell it in words, but, seen with one's eyes, it was an entire philosophy.

By dint of walking, winding, and climbing, I reached the summit of the Kasbah and entered the Rue Kataroudjil, which is the Montmartre of Algiers. Again I found myself in a crowd, in an uproar; but here there were no machines, and the din was Oriental.

Later, I was to return to this street many times, and I never found it empty even in bad weather. That first evening, the weather was beautiful, and I had difficulty making my way through the mob. Here were men of all sorts and conditions, dressed in the most different fashions . . . Arab dockers . . . Moroccan coalmen . . . overstuffed Mozabites . . . Nomads from the South . . .

Few Christians, except among the soldiers . . . Zouaves . . . spahis . . . sharpshooters. . . . A group of sailors pitched along as if in a storm . . .

And all of them were coming and going, passing and re-passing, back and forth before the green and blue and pink and red and yellow doors in which lounged the bold-face prostitutes.

Their cries, their songs, their laughter pierced your flesh like banderillas . . . And I too began to use my eyes, to look for the woman with whom I could best rest from my long journey, in whose arms I could rid myself of the sadness which falls on those who travel far from home.

I did not progress very fast . . . The crowd made it impossible. And then too I had to look at the girls carefully . . . Would there not be one from my country? By turns, I hoped to find such a one instantly, and never to find her . . .

For to find her would prove that there were unchaste women in Kabylia too . . .

And not to find her would mean that no one could wholly comfort me that night.

Like the others, I retraced my steps, walking still more slowly, even stopping from time to time to see better. Among all those vulgar, painted faces, was there one which showed a trace of freshness, a remnant of pride, a hint of innocence? . . . No, I saw nothing but women blighted forever.

So, accepting defeat, I looked for a corner where I could at least sit down on the ground without being jostled every instant.

A little farther on, the street widened, making an angle, and in that recess I saw a house whose white front was a relief to the eyes after the rainbow colors with which the others were decorated.

The door was shut, but a peep-hole let out enough light to show that a knocker as bright as gold hung on it and that it was two steps above the level of the street.

I approached, and sat down like a beggar on the upper step, leaning my head against the door, which was made of waxed wood, soft to the touch and odorous besides.

First there was a tinkling of bracelets . . . Then the clatter of a slipper . . . Then the murmuring voices of a company which was either small or too well-mannered to make much noise . . .

Was I on the threshold of one of those family mansions which still exist in the heart of the Kasbah between two houses of pleasure and on whose pediment the owner, to avoid mistakes, always carefully has the words "DECENT HOUSE" inscribed in large capital letters, although the spelling is apt to vary?

Fewer and fewer people passed . . . The noises drew away, faded . . . In the house itself, all was silent . . .

With my head resting against that great stillness, I should perhaps have fallen asleep. But I noticed that another odor

had mingled with the scent of cedar which rose from the door, an odor which came filtering through its cracks and was apparently composed of the odors I had always breathed and known: roses . . . honey . . . virgin wax . . . verbenas . . . and rosemary. It seemed as if all Kabylia had suddenly assailed my nostrils . . .

I jumped up. I glued my nose to the door.

What was behind it?

. . . Carpets . . . carved chests . . . pottery vessels in a marble vestibule lighted by a luster which bore little colored glasses. And in each glass, a wick in oil, burning as in our mosque at home.

And there I stood, lost in ecstasy, until the very black face of a negress appeared on the other side of the peephole:

"What are you doing there? . . . What do you want, son of the devil?"

She had banished the mirage too brutally, and now she was talking to me as no one had ever dared to do. It is never safe to insult a Kabyle. I answered wrathfully:

"Bastard of the devil yourself! I want to know whose house this is . . ."

"It belongs to a woman whom you are not rich enough to see, still less to know."

She made as if to leave . . . I flashed a coin at the level of her eyes . . . And I changed my tone:

"O my mother, what do you know of me? There are sons of *kaid*s disguised as beggars . . . At least tell me the name of this wonder of the world . . ."

"Her mother called her simply 'Baya'. . . . But now the whole earth knows her as 'Baya the Dancer.'"

"If that is true . . . Open the door for me!"

"Ah! Ya-yaie! . . . Are you mad? Why should I open it for you?"

"Because I am a Kabyle too, and I was born in her *duar*."



Then I heard the bolt drawn, and the key turned in the lock. And, startled by my own boldness, I took my courage in both hands and entered the door of Baya the Dancer. I had known of her only by hearsay, yet she had already inspired me to a poem which I thought rather good.

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Around Baya—her name, her personality, and her adventurous life—a sort of legend had grown up in Kabyle in recent years.

For, from being a simple shepherdess, she had become a dancer by her audacity and a rich woman by her talent. And her fame was more than local.

She had triumphed in most of the capitals of Europe, had long delighted the audiences of a famous music hall in Paris, and had been the chief attraction of an American film.

Then she had had the intelligence to retire from the stage and the screen before age or the fickleness of her admirers forced her to do so, and to invest the bulk of her money in Kabylia, where she owned immense estates and flocks. She had entrusted their supervision to her nearest relatives, who were not the last to sing her praises, though they had been the first to curse her and even to cast her off.

Now, with the immense success she had achieved and the huge fortune she had accumulated, it was not a question of indecency but of art. Since she had worn cloth-of-gold, no one seemed to remember that she had left the *duar* bare-foot, in rags, and with a rather battered virginity.

By dint of giving alms in mosques, she was even on the way to gaining the respect of the strait-laced. And it seemed within the realm of possibility that later on, after a few more generous and properly placed donations, the world might eventually remember her as a sort of female *marabout* . . .

For the time being, old women gossiped about her suc-

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cesses in a manner which might well have endangered the virtue of the ripe girls who listened to them. And young men dreamed of her every time the demon stirred their blood.

For we also knew that she owned a dancing house in the Upper Kasbah. She usually left it to other young women to amuse rich travelers at her house. But sometimes she herself still danced for the favorites of fortune in this world.

And it was said that she always gave a good reception to anyone who came from her native land.

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Time passed and she did not appear . . . No doubt the old negress would return and say that Lalla Baya had gone to sleep and that I had better come back some other night. That would mean never, for I should never summon up so much courage again.

So, expecting to be politely turned away at any moment, I began walking up and down the patio and looking with the greatest interest at whatever rare and precious objects might be displayed there, both so that I could describe them to others and have the pleasure of remembering them myself.

The patio was even more richly decorated than the vestibule, and was likewise in the Oriental style. However, there was a piano on a little platform, and in the opposite corner a piece of furniture with several drawers, which was not in the Arab or Berber tradition either . . .

I went a little farther and, on one of the pillars supporting the wooden balcony which ran around the inside of the patio, I saw a tablet on which there was an inscription in golden letters and in three languages—French, English, and German. It said that the house had been designated a his-

toric dwelling because it had been inhabited by high functionaries during the days of the Turkish occupation.

In consequence of this honorable distinction, numerous tourists visited the house in the daytime, accompanied by their wives and daughters. If they came back at night alone, with less pure intentions, it certainly cost them a great deal more.

In any case, the perfect proportions of the patio, the richness of the materials used in its construction, the charm of the sculptures which decorated the pillars, were enough to justify the artistic enthusiasm of a tourist, whether by night or by day.

But, for my part, as soon as the woman appeared I forgot the setting.

When I saw her for the first time, Baya—if her detractors were to be believed—had reached the age at which, in our country, love is forbidden to women by the indifference of men. Yet she had not ceased, nor would she soon cease, to excite desire.

In those days, too, she was blonde. She became tawny later. She was hardly fat enough, now she is too fat. But these little changes are unimportant in the case of a woman like Baya, whose beauty is not all that she has to offer.

Baya was—Baya still is—like one of those holy places which many a pilgrim has visited, and so every newcomer falls instantly under the spell of the accumulated love which they emanate.

She was willing to let me look at her for a moment from a distance. But as soon as I had the boldness to approach her, she gave me to understand that unless one was a *kaid*, the son of a *kaid*, a high-ranking officer, a member of the Government, or a prominent colonist, there could be no question of her granting one anything more than these few instants of ecstatic possession.

She added graciously:

"I believe that I can trust you . . . as if we were relatives. . . . And it's true that once a daughter of the daughter of my uncle almost married your father, the famous Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif, whose reputation for sanctity so far surpasses his fortune . . ."

She paused . . . and looked me over from head to foot, no doubt in order to form a better idea of what I might be worth. Then she gently continued:

"Falsehood is inadmissible between fellow countrymen, and still more between relatives . . . it is late . . ."

(Here she pretended to yawn, and the rest of her sentence was spoken a little dreamily . . .)

" . . . Tell me the truth, as if I were your sister . . . how much money have you on you? Much? . . . a little? . . . none at all?"

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On the eve of my departure, my father, to show how pleased he was by my success, had dug up some of the silver doudros with which, in good times, our Kabyle houses are paved underground.

My mother had added to them three small gold pieces, the fruit of patient economies, laid aside by herself and Mariam from the returns of the hen-house, of which the profits are reserved for our women.

But it was to Aunt Zohra that I owed most of my treasure. When she learned of my success, she had sent a large money-order to my master. The old lady had meant that the greater part of it should go to reward Émile Stiévenart. I need hardly say that he gave the entire sum to me. So I was able to make Baya this answer:

"O my sister, since you permit me to call you so, if I have not money enough to boast about, especially in such a house

as yours, I at least have enough to conduct myself becomingly tonight and the following nights also."

Then, giving me a real smile and clapping her hands, which are amazingly little, she ordered the Negress (who acted as door-keeper, masseuse, cook, fortune-teller, and mistress of the revels) to ask such of her girls as were not busy to come downstairs and welcome me.

C H A P T E R

• 8 •

WHEN I left Baya's house of pleasure, it was day. The muezzins were calling the faithful to the first prayer. Far away, the church bells of the infidels were sounding too.

The morning air had a taste of salt and iodine. The coolness of it passed over my head like a kindly hand and dissipated the headache I was beginning to feel.

Compared with the noise and the crowd which had animated it the evening before, the streets seemed surprisingly quiet and empty. But there were many cats prowling about.

And from time to time, keeping close to the walls, a Moslem woman would glide by, poorly clad and closely veiled. They must, I thought, be "Fatimas" hurrying to their daily employments in the lower town—the French town.

Thus, at dawn, the steps of decent women obliterated the lingering footprints of the daughters of joy.

I walked on at random, and coming to a fountain I performed the ablutions which must precede each of the five

prayers that mark out the pious Moslem's day from dawn to dark. Beside me, several men were doing likewise—not speaking, not appearing to see one another.

Opposite the fountain a small café was opening. It was painted a green as delicate as that of a newly expanded leaf. Over the door a bright red sign bore the following inscription:

Papaluet's

T. P. L. G.

I puzzled for a moment over the capitals, which meant nothing to me; then I advanced to the door and put in my head. Inside, a tall fellow was putting the last touches to cleaning the establishment; he was whistling a military march.

He had on nothing but a sleeveless jersey and a pair of linen trousers which kept slipping down on his loins.

He was no longer in his first youth . . . His face was brown as an Arab's from the South, but he had a readier smile and a readier tongue than an Arab's, for as soon as he saw me, he called jovially:

"Ho! Son! Coming in, or staying out? Afraid old Papaluet will eat you . . . or what? . . . Papaluet is me . . . Come in, son. But watch it—eh? It's only half dry . . . And what are you doing so early in this 'dreadful' part of town?"

I was hungry. I asked him if he could give me something to eat—meanwhile inspecting him with the greatest interest. He had magnificent muscles and an astounding tattoo on either arm . . . On the right it was a phallus—but stylized and crossed by so many victorious inscriptions that I at first took it for a presentation bayonet . . . On the left it was a siren; her tail and long tresses encircled his wrist and elbow.

He answered: "Can I? Of course I can. The coffee's made. Do you smell it or don't you? You can have some with your

nose right now, without putting out any cash. But for milk and brioches—hold everything!”

At this point I abridge his prologue, which was much longer and utterly untranslatable. For Papaluet spoke nothing but *Sabir*, a dialect used in the great Mediterranean ports of North Africa. It is a language whose principal ingredient—supposedly French—is mixed with words and expressions from Spanish, Moorish, Italian, Berber, Corsican, Maltese, Turkish, and numerous other languages. All of which makes it extremely difficult to understand. Thus, for example, the word “Papaluet,” which had taken the place of the proprietor’s real name, meant both that the latter was “louette,” that is, easy to get on with, paternally inclined toward his customers, and that he was from a suburb of Algiers whose name is “Bab-el-Oued,” but which is pronounced “Babalurette . . . Bablued . . . Papaluet.” It is a place where children suck in a knowledge of Sabir with their mother’s milk.

As for the mysterious capitals at the bottom of Papaluet’s sign, they could be translated into good French as “Tout Pour La Gueule.” He told me so without my asking him—for he was terribly proud of his motto, which served as a rallying cry for all the good eaters and good drinkers in the neighborhood.

Then the Maltese milkman passed, and condescended to milk one of his goats for us. And after the celebrated brioches had arrived too, I found myself drinking an excellent cup of café au lait at the counter, a sumptuous mahogany monument of which Papaluet seemed even prouder than he was of his sign.

“Not on your life! . . . You won’t see the like of that for a long time—here or anywhere else! . . . Those feet are elephants’ heads with the tusks . . . made of genuine celluloid!”

Papaluet was as curious as he was talkative. He began



asking me questions, which I answered as well as I could between mouthfuls.

Could anyone resist his intense cordiality? Nor was I averse to exhibiting my attainments before a grown man, and particularly a Christian!

When I told him that I was about to be admitted to the Normal School at La Bouzaréa, he whistled admiringly:

"Oh! That's something! . . . Impossible!"

And then added, slapping his thigh: "A perfesser! Poh, poh, poh! A good-looking kid like you—I'd say more likely you'd be a pimp from one of the streets higher up!"

Then he offered me a cigarette, which I accepted without taking offense, for if one should usually consider it an insult to be taken for one of those fellows who fleece the girls, it was obvious, in this case, that Papaluet saw nothing in his hypothesis which could in any way injure my honor.

At any rate, he immediately added:

"Oh, beg your pardon! Granted? I should have seen that your clothes aren't good enough for that job!"

Which really hurt me.

But he was already going on, in an amazed voice:

"Perfesser!!! It's the Holy Virgin herself who sent you here!" He crossed himself devoutly. "Virgin of the Morning, save me! Listen, boy! My father let me go to school only two years. I admit I never did get to like it . . . However, if he'd given me a hiding every day, now I wouldn't be like a damned donkey. So listen . . . I can't read, or next thing to it . . . Print, well, sometimes . . . But handwriting . . . basta!"

He took a crumpled letter from his pocket.

"See here! . . . Hell of a thing! . . . That letter there came yesterday, and I still don't know what's in it . . . You don't just yell to anybody who goes by: Come on in and read me my secrets!

"Sometimes the fat woman next door—the one who takes on all the soldiers—reads my letters to me, bless her . . . She'd never blab . . . But ever since yesterday she's had so many coming . . . I couldn't disturb her . . . And now she's sleeping. Till nobody knows when . . . And meanwhile, perhaps I'm missing a good piece of business!"

He handed me the letter.

"Go to it! You've got a face I can trust, like she has. And what have you to lose? A minute or two of your time, huh?"

If I remember correctly, the letter concerned the possibility of making a deal in liquor and required an immediate answer. So I proposed to Papaluet that I should write it for him. But he shook his head.

"No—no need of writing. . . . When you write something, the other man can always prove it. . . . If you talk to him, your words are gone with the wind."

Then he made his way to a telephone which was concealed in a corner and set to work, egging on the operator with a facility which I greatly envied him.

I had never had an opportunity to talk over the telephone.

Then, to reward my services, Papaluet offered me a second cup of coffee, since I obstinately refused to touch anything containing alcohol. When he had downed a glass to my health, his conversation became scintillating. I could understand only a very small part of what he said, but as he took the trouble to illuminate it by gestures whose humor was perfectly explicit, I was soon laughing until the tears came.

He sweat joy at every pore . . . He filled you with confidence at every word . . . He enjoyed the least good fortune like a god . . . And what was not yet good fortune, he seemed to have the power of transforming at will—it would be good fortune in a minute . . . just because he wanted it to be. He roared like a lion . . . he exploded like thunder . . . But deep in his dark, velvety eyes there was a purely human

gentleness . . . He used coarse words which, by contrast, somehow managed to evoke the delicacy of certain things . . .

I liked him immensely . . .

When I was ready to leave, he walked to the door with me and then followed me with his eyes so benevolently that I felt the warmth of his look on my back and had to turn around and wave to him. Whereupon he called:

"Come again . . . Whenever you like . . . Tomorrow . . . next day . . . and I'll treat you to a real *macaronade*.\* Adíós! son. Come soon—come this evening! . . . That's right!"

If I had listened to my heart, I should have turned back at once, but I had to look in at the Hôtel des Bains, where they might be wondering what had become of me.

I entered in some embarrassment and, having made my way to Mademoiselle Hermine's sterile cage, I timidly raised my eyes to her face . . . expecting to find in it either relief at seeing me or disapproval of my wickedness . . . But she smiled at me, and returned to her account book without even asking me a single question.

And I began to understand that in such a big city certain things are not as important as they appear to be elsewhere.

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I should have liked to take a little nap in my wretched room before lunch. But on the terrace I found Marie and Fatima, busily taking down the dry linen of yesterday's wash to make room for the wet linen of today's.

And because, as each sheet or towel came down, it revealed a fresh segment of the horizon, I soon lost all my desire to sleep.

Under their diligent hands that morning, Algiers was like a beautiful woman whose maids are undressing her for her new lover . . .

\* Macaroni with meat, tomato sauce, mushrooms, etc.

While I was admiring one wonder in front of me, Marie and Fatima were unveiling another behind my back.

When I turned around, I could see the Kasbah which I had just left, with its houses in capricious tiers along the slope that rises from the sea to the old Turkish rampart; and they were painted in colors which recalled the blue of the sky and the sea, the pink of the mountains, the green of the trees which clothed the hillsides.

It was impossible to say in which direction the view was more fascinating . . . I began to pivot on my heels because I could not take it all in at once.

If only I owned the Hôtel des Bains! Instead of spending my time washing dirty linen, I would devote myself to opening the eyes of ignorant tourists by bringing them up here and letting them see the beauty of the panorama which was spread before me!

In the end, I would have made more money by it. But it was only a dream . . . I dallied with it for a moment . . . And then the clock of the Great Mosque reminded me that it was time for me to lunch, before going to call on my brother, Dr. Ahmed ben Ahmed Shelif.

I had decided that the early afternoon would be the most suitable time for a visit, which I was obliged to make not only because I had promised our mother that I would do so but also as a sign of the respect which we Berbers feel that we owe to our elders.

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My brother's office was located in the middle of the French town in a narrow and rather ugly street (it had no view of the sea), but which, I learned later, was famous for its shops and particularly for the number of fashionable people who exhibited themselves to one another there, chiefly in the evening.

A blush of pride rose to my face as I read the sign beside the door of one of the highest apartment buildings in the street. For every passer-by might read, just as I was reading:

DOCTOR AHMED BEN AHMED SHELIF

Formerly consulting physician  
to the Hospitals

*Cardiologist*

(Office hours: 3 to 5)

(2nd floor)

I was agitated. I pulled the bell so gently that, after waiting several minutes, I had to ring again before I was heard. Then the door opened and a woman appeared on the threshold.

She was old, fat, pudgy, too blonde, with golden eyes like Cirta's, but my bitch's eyes were more modest even when she was in heat.

The woman's face was so heavily painted that it brought back the prostitutes' faces I had seen in the Upper Kasbah. How could Ahmed have hired such a creature to let people into his office?

Meanwhile, the creature greeted me, smiled . . . It was a grimace rather than a smile and it revealed so many pieces of gleaming gold in her mouth that it was impossible to believe that they were merely useless ornaments, like Aziba's one gold-sheathed tooth . . .

And how could a servant have had her mouth paved with such a costly metal?

But was she a servant?

Her light silk dress, embroidered and re-embroidered, was like a festival flag. . . . Her hands glittered with rings. . . .

I was so stupefied that I could not enter . . . that I did not open my mouth. So she began the conversation.

Her voice too was vulgar and even husky. . . . There was no doubt of it—in an earlier period of her existence, she must have shouted too much at night, standing before a low door.

She said:

"Have you come to see the doctor? You will have a long wait. . . . It's not his office hours yet."

Her tone had become contemptuous and she had stopped smiling—she was looking over my clothes with an eye which appeared to disapprove of their cheapness.

As for me, I know I turned pale at finding myself obliged to tell her who I was and why I had more right than anyone to see Dr. Ben Ahmed Shelif at once.

Whereupon she let me in, shut the door behind me, and began calling: "Darling! It's your brother Mourad!"

Ahmed appeared almost at once, and I found it difficult to recognize him.

He must have been preparing to go out . . . He had on a hat.

I say "a hat." A hat after the Christian fashion instead of our symbolic *sheshiya* . . .

He had hastily taken it off, but, quick as he was, he was not quick enough.

Furthermore, I had in my memory a slim youth with curly hair and laughing eyes. And before me there stood a fattish man, half bald and dull-eyed.

"Good morning, Mourad," he said, and that was all.

In the presence of that foreign woman, it was impossible for us to exchange the ritual good wishes and to use the ceremonial gestures which are customary among us, particularly after people have not seen one another for a long time.

Then he conducted me into an apartment of the type which the French call a "dining room."

The furniture with which it was well filled was as ponderously rich as the old woman's jewels.

All the pieces were stuck above and below with so many gilded ornaments that if you were too upset to watch what you were doing, you could not sit down in a chair without scratching your legs from knee to ankle.

A table at which ten could have dined comfortably, and which seemed to have been used by only two, was nevertheless scattered with the remains of dishes: fowl, pastries, cheese, cakes . . . Numerous bottles, of which several were empty, stood among the debris.

This sight, after my glimpse of Ahmed wearing a hat, was enough to tell me what my brother had become and why he had so obstinately refused to return to our *bled* and practice his profession.

For could there be any decent explanation of the presence of this horrible old woman who wore a fortune on her fingers and kept shamelessly calling my brother "darling" in my presence?

And would it not have savored of a miracle if Ahmed, so soon after we had been obliged to refuse him the sum necessary to set himself up in a modest office, had acquired such a reputation for knowledge and skill that he could have earned enough to pay for all this splendid furniture?

Two things which, naturally, I could not say to him . . .

I was neither his father nor his elder brother, and the old woman—instead of withdrawing, as is our custom, and leaving the men free to talk—had boldly seated herself facing me.

Yet if my lips remained dumb, my silence must have been quite eloquent. In fact my silence, filled with reproaches and suspicions, created a feeling of embarrassment between us which grew more and more uncomfortable every minute.

Ahmed finally decided to begin the conversation on a light and almost amused tone, no doubt to conceal his uneasiness.

So I was going to be a teacher! That was something to be

really proud of! "You will earn at least a hundred francs a month, once you get your diploma!"

The old woman began to cackle disapprovingly. I merely answered:

"On a hundred francs a month, a man can live honorably in our country."

There was a fresh silence, which the old woman tried to break by offering me something which I could not drink:

"Rum . . . cognac . . . chartreuse?"

I refused her offer in such a way that she was not tempted to make it again. Then I rose, pretending that I must leave for La Bouzaréa at once.

But while I was proffering this courteous lie, I sensed perfectly that the others were only pretending to believe me out of politeness.

As I was going out, Ahmed said:

"Come to lunch here whenever you like. You'll find better food than you'll be getting at school . . . We'll be glad to have you—won't we, Charlotte?"

So, even to invite one of his closest male relatives, he had to ask the creature's consent.

She appeared to agree, but they were both careful not to set any date.

Invitations of that sort at least do not give a man indigestion . . .

We all knew, as we parted, that I would never again cross that threshold. As I went down the stairs, I was thinking that at least Ahmed had had the modesty not to mention our mother before that horrible creature.

Then, hanging my head, I quitted a house which, only a few minutes earlier, I had entered with a pride which had turned out to be premature.

And I walked on for a long time, choosing the most deserted streets.



In the course of my wanderings, I finally found myself at the city limits. Coming to a place called Saint-Eugène, I saw a crowd on the boulevard which leaves Algiers at that point and follows the shore at a little height above the sea. I approached.

Two Negroes and two Negresses—the latter holding on their knees baskets containing salt, sugar, and incense—were surrounded by a large number of women who, to judge by their costumes, appeared to belong to different races.

One by one, the women bought a propitiatory offering, went down the short flight of steps which led to the sea and, proceeding to the extreme end of a projecting rock, threw their salt or sugar or incense into the water, while, above them, the negroes uttered pious incantations.

An old Arab who was also watching this curious spectacle told me that the rock had once been the site of the tomb of a Moslem saint who was still believed to cure both the illnesses of women and the troubles of men.

Having thanked the old man, I waited my turn and bought incense and salt from the black magicians. Then, going down to the rock, I made my sacrifice to God and the sea, praying with all my heart that my residence in this city and my daily contact with Christians would never do to me what it had done to my brother.

On my way back from Saint-Eugène, feeling a little calmer already, I stopped in at Papaluet's. He shouted with delight when he saw me, gave me a good dinner, and then, noticing that I was still preoccupied and thinking that my preoccupation must be due to lack of money, he obligingly placed his cellar at my disposal, saying that I might sleep there free for as long as I wished.

I accepted his offer only to the extent of leaving my baggage there as soon as I had recovered it from the Hôtel des Bains et de la Colonie. I thought it useless to keep a room

which was expensive and, furthermore, much too far from the places where I expected to amuse myself until the end of my vacation.

That same evening, I returned to Baya's house. And I made such good use of her hospitality that, by the time the night was over, I had almost forgotten my brother's shame and the unpleasantness of our interview.

After that, everything went more pleasantly than you could imagine, or than I—who do not wish to be taken for a braggart—dare to relate.

For, every night at Baya's, I made the acquaintance of a different girl. And every day, in the Kasbah, I was able to meditate in a different mosque.

And because each of our holy places is not only filled with peace and silence and shadow, but also furnished with mats and thick carpets I likewise took a refreshing siesta in one of them every day—under the eye of a God who, more logical than the God of the Christians, would not think of being offended because men make use of a body which He Himself has expressly furnished with means whereby they may amuse themselves a little during the dreary days of their sojourn upon earth.

What the French call "the apéritif hour" always found me at Papaluet's. After which he would give me a dinner. His cooking was good, and since I had not eaten much lunch, I did it honor.

In return, I had undertaken to put some order into his account books, which had previously been very badly kept.

He said:

"Poh, poh, poh! If I had you for a son, what we two couldn't do together!"

At any rate I was his friend. And I can say that, after my master, he was the second Christian whom, anywhere and under any circumstances, I would have defended against

anyone, even against the hatred of my own people, and at the risk of my own life.

To return to the happy period which I am describing, it must be admitted that if my days were not expensive my nights were extremely so. On the eighth morning of my stay in the Kasbah, I had not a douro left in my pocket.

Which did not matter—because in a few hours I was to enter the Normal School, where I should have no expenses.

Furthermore, not only had I emptied my purse, but I had left in Baya's hands the presents which my family had charged me to give to my new teachers—and I did not regret it.

For it is useless to regret what it is impossible to recover, and, while I was being plundered in one fashion, I was enriching myself in another.

I had kept my burnoose—that was the chief thing. And if my purse seemed empty, I was not completely without money.

For we peasants of Kabylia always have a way of keeping a last resource.

Mine consisted of a few bank notes issued by the Bank of Algiers. Before going to bed at Baya's, I had been careful to hide them between two verses from the Koran inside the leather amulet which has hung on my chest since I was born.

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Male friendship sometimes gives you a chance to make up a little for the high cost of women's love.

As I left, Papaluet slipped a small sum of money into my pocket, saying:

"O son, do not refuse, or I'll be mad as a mad dog . . . It's just a little advance! There! I'll be needing your help tomorrow as much as I did yesterday, to keep my figures

straight. Try and fix it at your perfessers' whorehouse so they'll let you come back here often!"

Then we embraced as though we were more than brothers, if I am to judge by the reception I received from my father's son Dr. Ahmed ben Ahmed Shelif. First in the French fashion . . . Next bowing ceremoniously at a distance, then approaching each other to send the shade of a kiss fluttering from heart to lip, from lip to heart in a winged gesture after the Moslem fashion.

After that I set out for La Bouzaréa.

## ♦ 9 ♦

LA BOUZARÉA is situated at an altitude of twelve hundred feet above sea level. There is an observatory there, as well as several clusters of houses.

The Normal School is in a hollow on the road which leads to the center of the village. There is no view. In summer you are eaten alive by mosquitoes.

The French village lies around a little square surrounded by buildings of no particular architectural style. On this little square, ragged men played bowls all year round. When you had passed them, you reached the road which leads to an enchanting place called the Celestial Village. It is scattered with mansions which were once the property of rich Turks and which now belong to the fortunate folk of this world, Christian or Moslem.

To reach La Bouzaréa from Algiers at the period of which I am writing, you had to take an electric streetcar, which brought you as far as the hills of El-Biar.

From El-Biar to La Bouzaréa you then took a diligence,

which appeared to date from the first days of the French conquest. Furthermore, the passengers were loaded into it in a way which was endurable only if you chanced to find yourself beside sufficiently fleshy fellow voyagers. Quite often, however, there were so many passengers that the youngest men had to ascend to the roof of the "curricie." As the road was not yet macadamized, those on the roof soon found themselves covered with dust.

Which was what happened to me on this first trip, and I arrived so powdered with white that even my eyebrows appeared to be those of an old man. This phenomenon I was able to observe in the looking-glass in the den of the school porter, to whom I had thought it expedient to present myself immediately and who had two letters for me. They had arrived some days ago, he said.

True it is that I ought to have entered the school sooner, but I was having too good a time outside.

One of the letters was from my master, the other from Zina.

My master sent me his best wishes, hoped that I would work hard and keep happy, and tried to calm my fears on the subject of Cirta. She had understood, he wrote, that our separation would not be for long; while he had explained it all to her, she had nodded gravely. Was she not the most intelligent of dogs? I could picture the scene to myself, especially as my master knew the art of using a few words to say a great many things, which in turn suggested still others.

Zina's style was far from attaining such perfect lucidity. But even its imperfections made it more charming.

Zina told me how her grief was communicated to the things around her, until they too seemed to long for me.

She made trees, animals, the sky, the stars, and streams speak in her own fashion, and maliciously reported what the village gossips had said after my departure. They were argu-

ing the question whether, in a school staffed by French *taleb*s I would be made to eat unclean things, or if some respect would be shown to the son of such a holy man as Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif.

I assured Zina when I wrote her that there were so many Moslem pupils—Kabyles, Turks, or Moors—at the Normal School that special quarters had been provided for them, as well as a refectory whose Arabian chef naturally respected the basic principles of our religion on such an important subject.

In closing, I said that she could tell my mother that I had seen Ahmed, that he was well, and had more than enough to eat. There was no use in telling my mother now in what way Ahmed had procured such an abundance of good things; and even later I did not tell her. So that she died without ever learning that one of her sons was living in slavery, dependent upon the bounty of a horrible old Christian woman.

I ended my letter to Zina with these words: "I send you a rose which I picked in the great park which surrounds my new school."

This park was merely a modest garden and it was chiefly devoted to vegetables, but I knew that it would be pleasanter for Zina to imagine my life in a vast and marvellously flowery domain than in a little dusty enclosure.

It was a pleasure which I owed her—to make up for my sins.

For, now that I had her letter, I realized how much I had forgotten her during that week among other women.

The rose was small and had only a few petals, but they were velvety and a beautiful red. To tell the truth, it was Baya who had given it to me, just as I was preparing to leave her house.

If Zina had ever found it out (though there was little chance that she ever might), she would most probably have

been angry. But she would have been wrong—for the most seductive of women had taken that rose from her corsage, all for me, and when I smelled it, it was as if I were savoring the perfume of her skin. So it was a real sacrifice I was making to my love for Zina, when I slipped the rose into my letter.

By the same mail I also wrote to my master, expatiating on the wonders of Algiers, thanking him for his attention to my Cirta, assuring him that I was very happy in my new environment—of which, naturally, I could know very little, as I had only been at the school for two hours. But even to the most indulgent of masters I could not confess what I had been doing in the Upper Kasbah during the past week!

So a week in the city had taught me deceit.

In any case, I had done well not to wait before telling my master that I was content, because it was important for the peace of his soul. And a few days later I should never have had the courage to tell him any such thing.

Not that I found severity or scorn or fussiness at my new school. But until now I had always lived as free as the freest of Kabyles in the *bled*, and here I had perpetually to keep myself in check, both in order to seem well-mannered and to make a show of respecting the principles of a civilization which was utterly different from my own. This occidental armor was too new to me and it chafed me everywhere.

My father had never demanded more of his sons than a few basic virtues; he was well satisfied if they:

“Respected God’s commandments.

“Respected the property of our fellow villagers—douros, chickens, sheep, wives, or daughters.

“Had the courage to fight when the occasion demanded, together with the daily courage to do their share of farm work, without which the world could not live.”

At my master’s school, my life had not been very different from this patriarchal pattern. Provided that I had been suf-



ficiently studious during the day, he gave me plenty of liberty afterward. And if, having left me at the door of my room at night, he found me sleeping under a eucalyptus in the morning, he did not even mention it.

I had entered the Normal School in October. October is still a warm month in our climate, though it is usually freshened by beneficent rains after the four or five absolutely dry months of the African summer.

That year, it did not rain until November; we stifled by day in the classrooms, and even more at night in our dormitories.

We also ate too much at night. And what is the use of eating when there is to be no immediate demand upon one's strength? Do you give a mule oats if you aren't going to set him to turning the water-wheel? Do you put gas in a car when you haven't a trip to make?

This French habit of eating needlessly, as if every day were a holiday, seemed absurd to me. But it was a savory absurdity, and I am a gourmand. So, evenings, I did not have the courage to push away my well-filled plate. Afterward, the heat generated by what I had eaten forced me to wait even longer for the sleep which, night after night, had fled me ever since I had been at the school.

Nevertheless, we were obliged to go to our dormitories at the hour prescribed by the rules.

When everyone had turned in, I began by sitting up in my bed.

Until now, I had always slept on the ground, in the Moslem fashion. Furthermore, I hated my bed, whose height I considered a danger. During those first nights, I was even so afraid of rolling onto the floor while I slept that, when I felt I was dozing off, I clutched the mattress with both hands, as if I were clinging to the edge of a precipice.

Having sat up in my mountainous bed and thrown back

the sheet, I stripped—first the upper half of my body, then the lower. In spite of that, and even if I did not stir, sweat poured over me.

If the Algerian coast, which is warm and mild, has advantages in winter, in summer it has a disadvantage: whenever the south or east wind does not blow, the humidity is unbearable.

For many years after I first came there I suffered from this, and even now I still suffer from it at times.

Then, to take my mind off this annoying sweating, I listened to the breathing of my sleeping schoolmates.

Some of them snored in a way which was comical . . . There were some too who, in a confidential whisper, occasionally uttered words it was hard to understand, fragments of sentences in which I tried to find some meaning . . .

They all appeared to be chaste so far . . . We had only recently arrived, and the intimate relationships which are bound to occur in boarding schools are formed only after some time, when continence becomes too painful, especially in such a climate, for young men who are not saints.

But still sleep would not close my eyes . . . My nerves were on edge with sleeplessness . . . Then, unable to bear it any longer, I cautiously slipped off my bed and—not even dressing for fear that the rustling of my clothes would attract the attention of our proctor—I made my way to the end of the dormitory, and, breathing a prayer that the door would not squeak, I reached the goal of my expedition—that is, the wide landing on which a large window opened.

How delicious it was to inhale the wind at last!

Before long there were two of us who drank clandestinely at this refreshing spring.

Belkasim was the son of the *sha-ush* who served the Administrator of a Kabyle commune not far from ours.

He too had long lived free in the open air, and he would have been glad to continue his simple life forever if one day the Administrator had not decided differently.

"You must set an example by sending at least one of your sons to this school," he had said to Belkasim's father. "It is incredible . . . It was founded just for you Kabyles, and no one goes to it!"

So Belkasim's father had been obliged to promise to alienate the liberty of one of his sons the very next day.

He had only three . . .

The eldest was a lazy good-for-nothing. Under the pretence of helping his father serve the Administrator, he spent his days lying under the latter's office window, and from that privileged position tried to catch the cigarettes which the Frenchman threw out half-smoked.

Being at his usual post that day, he heard that one of his father's sons was to be put in a place where he would finally have to work. He was so frightened that he set off in the direction of the brush, where he remained for two full days, hiding like a frightened hare.

Belkasim's other brother was a congenital idiot and consequently unteachable.

So there was only Belkasim left.

Which was why, having gone to sleep in blissful ignorance, he found himself seized at dawn by his father and dragged off to school like a lamb to the slaughter-house.

He had never become used to his slavery, for he was totally unfitted for study and his memory could no more retain what his teachers tried to put into it than your hand can hold water. Nevertheless, the Administrator—who had taken it into his head to "make someone" of his *sha-ush's* son—succeeded, by using a great deal of influence, in getting Belkasim into the La Bouzaréa Normal School.

First we breathed deeply in front of the open window. Then we smoked—sometimes until dawn . . . So that the rising bell would ring before I had even closed my eyes.

After that, for the entire day, except for an hour allotted to a nap, I had to keep my eyes open and appear to listen to lessons which were always full of matter and quite often indigestible.

It made me think of the feast which certain Moslem chiefs, having become vastly rich, feel it their duty to offer to those whom they wish to dazzle. Enormous repasts, where the number of dishes is far more in evidence than subtle choice and pure ingredients.

We were stuffed with knowledge, and Belkasim, nauseated, said to me:

“O Mourad! Let us leave this place! . . . I have a little money . . . you too . . . We’ll take to the road . . . Or we’ll find a boat to carry us to Marseilles . . . They say it’s easy to get hired at the port. Otherwise, we’ll have four years of this life to get through, and I’ll go mad before then! . . .”

I answered: “Do as you wish. But I cannot.”

For I was thinking of my master, of my father, and above all of my brother Ali who, to save us, had been forced to enlist for seven years.

The slavery of his barracks was certainly worse than the slavery of our school. Yet he had borne it without once complaining, and he had not deserted.

Then Belkasim sighed:

“So much for that. If you stay, I stay!”

So passed a whole month.

## ♦ I O ♦

EATING too much, sleeping hardly at all, working nevertheless, and being constantly bored—the consequences of such a sorry life were not long in appearing. And I, who had seldom been ill in the *bled*, and then only for a few hours of fever, soon found myself a prey to successive ailments.

The first, which came on me one morning, I thought was a cramp due to some clumsy movement. But it soon increased until it was causing me horrible pain in my arms and legs, and next I found that I could not move a limb.

The school doctor asked me:

“You must have stood in a draft while you were sweating?”

I could not answer yes . . . I could not answer no . . .

For nothing was surer than that I had done precisely that every night by standing, sweating and stark naked, in front of our open window. But I had often done as much in Kabylia with a wind blowing on me and had never suffered any bad results.

And I was not going to risk a reprimand or having my school leaves taken away by confessing.

So I answered the doctor evasively. In any case, he did not even appear to listen to my answer. He prescribed a remedy, which was partially successful. For, three days later, I could move my limbs again. But to do so cost me horrible pains in my stomach.

Some time later—although it was November, the hot weather continued—great pimples appeared on my face and body. Seeing them, the *tubib*—to whom I had been unable to avoid returning—looked at me suspiciously and asked me whether, despite my youth, I had not frequented some woman of ill fame. And this time he waited patiently for my answer.

As decently as possible, I told him that I had begun to frequent women long before the date of my admission to the Normal School. That, in fact, I had first known a woman some time in the course of my twelfth year, and that ever since that happy epoch I had not ceased to possess numerous women and as often as possible.

He seemed shocked by my frank answer and immediately set about pricking my arm to remove a pint of my blood.

Then, without even saying good-by, he left—having first told the male nurse at the infirmary to keep me there incommunicado until he had obtained the result of the analysis which it would be necessary to make of my blood.

Leaving me quite surprised and somewhat uneasy . . .

Could I have caught the plague?

But Makluf, the nurse, who was an Arab by birth, began to laugh, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

“If you have so many pimples on your body, and a touch of fever too, it is because the housekeeper has been giving us fish to eat almost every day because it is cheap. And in Kabylia you never ate fish at all, and now, all of a sudden,

you've had too much. But I can cure you if you do as I shall tell you."

When he had told me, I agreed—the more so as his system was the same as my father's and my father was the wisest of men and had taught it to us as an inheritance from *his* father. Now, in turn, I offer it to my readers.

It consists—no matter what your illness may be—of retirement and silence, together with a jug of pure water set within reach of your hand.

From time to time you drink a small sip, and at the same time pray God to do the rest.

By this system I have always seen the majority of curable sicknesses cured. And as for the sicknesses which were not cured, it was usually the fault of age or of the patient's too feeble constitution, and no doctor in the world could have done any better.

Both my pimples and my fever responded to this simple treatment in forty-eight hours.

Then, as the *tubib* did not reappear, Makluf did his best to amuse and to teach me. He had been living in the school for over ten years. So, in a few days, he ran through the teaching staff of the institution, expressing views on their temperaments, their natures, and their characters, which I was more than once to find admirably just and penetrating.

He began by saying:

"The man we call the Director does not really run the school. He is too busy at something else. Rather than waste his time over young men who are almost always disrespectful or disobedient, he prefers to charm old bits of stone into telling him why they have remained in one place for such a long time or how they have managed to roll to another . . .

"He values them more highly than gold, and he has quantities of them. And he keeps collecting more . . . Pretend

you've mistaken the door one day . . . Go into his room. You'll see such a stone heap—on the floor, on the furniture! . . . They say he sleeps with the ones he likes best . . . He has even gone into the hearts of the Hoggar searching for his ancient stones, into the Sahara . . .

"No, they are not always even engraved. And that is just the reason why his talents are so great, and at the same time so open to question . . . There are some who say:

" 'Bah! He is nothing but an old fool!'

"And others say:

" 'What a great scientist he is!'

"As for me, I am more inclined to believe the ones who speak well of him. But about that, as about so many other matters, the truth will not be known, perhaps, until both you and I have been dead for many years. *Inshallah* (if God wills)!

"Meanwhile, if you want to see this man among men smile like a little child, one day when you come back from your *bled*, bring him an old stone. But watch out! Ha! A real one! . . . A rare one! . . . He knows more about them than anyone in the world.

"And after that, whatever anyone may say to damage you in his eyes, he will not believe it!"

This portrait delighted my imagination.

Was it not fascinating to be the pupil of a man who made old stones talk?

I wondered about it all the rest of that day.

The next day Makluf began again:

"The old man really runs the school. The one who teaches you figures and numbers and is supposedly only Secretary of the Board. I call him 'Shudi'—the Monkey. Allah preserve me from ever having him find it out . . . He might do anything to me if he knew!"

This hypothesis seemed to me ridiculous. The man in



question was such a filthy looking old wretch that it seemed to me impossible he could harm anyone. I could not help laughing.

Makluf said sternly:

"You are wrong to laugh, little brother. And why are you laughing? Eh? Ah—you say to yourself, 'He's dirty and badly dressed.' Why, he does that on purpose . . . So that simpletons like you won't even suspect his power . . . How do I know that he is powerful? One prize day I saw—yes, saw—the Governor himself bow to him, bow very low . . . Oh! they did not know I was there. It was behind the orange grove.

"Why is he so powerful? . . . Here's why . . . Only don't ask me who told me, because I vowed silence on my father's bones. Now, listen . . . The Old Monkey belongs to a powerful secret society—which gives him the right to put three stars after his signature, stars like the ones the Christians put on their best bottles of cognac . . . Understand?"

And I answered:

"I understand," with a look of wonder, at the same time shaking my head as one does precisely when one doesn't understand at all. But Makluf had already begun a portrait of our history professor, drolly imitating his Nivernais accent to proclaim the following profession of faith—a strange enough creed in the mouth of a servant of the republic:

"Royalist! Gentlemen, that does not half express it! I am Merovingian!"

When he had done with the professors, the housekeeper, and a few others, Makluf began on the porter.

According to him, the porter was curious to the point of insanity and steamed open most of the letters addressed to new pupils and then resealed them as well as possible, his impudence being equal to his hardihood.

Then I remembered that the letters I had received from

Zina and my master showed certain dirty marks, the cause of which I now understood.

Makluf added:

"Fortunately, our God has given the porter a weakness for drink! So, at least in the evening, you can be sure he isn't spying on you from a dark corner . . . Therefore, if ever you want to slip out and breathe the night air, just be careful not to go anywhere near the main square in La Bouzaréa, where all the cafés are!"

Then he explained to me the various short-cuts which would take you to Algiers in the least possible time without the risk of meeting many people on the way.

So if the time I spent in the infirmary seemed wasted so far as my formal education was concerned, it was very usefully employed in giving me a knowledge of the new world which surrounded me . . . A knowledge which, later on, saved me from succumbing to despair again.

For Makluf had shown me that the school was not absolutely a prison and that, provided I appeared to be willing to obey the rules during the day, I could occasionally escape from it at night, and not only in thought.

Meanwhile, although I was cured, I could not leave my sickroom until the doctor gave his permission. And the doctor did not return until the sixth day, when he was forced to admit that the result of the first analysis had been negative. This was such a blow to him that he decided to undertake another and to keep me in the infirmary while it was being made.

I began to be angry, for if missing a week of school is nothing, it is hard to catch up again if you miss half a month.

Such was my state when, on the morning of the eighth day, Charles, a fellow pupil and a Christian, appeared at the door of my sickroom.

Under his arm he had a number of books, and in his coat

pocket a quantity of notes taken during lectures, as well as the outline of our classwork for the following week.

Blushing (for under the stress of emotion, his very white skin reddened quickly), he said:

"Excuse me . . . I'm not disturbing you? . . . I would have come sooner, but I did not dare . . . Do you feel better? . . . Can you do some work? . . . I thought perhaps you would want to keep up with the class."

That he had addressed me as "vous" instead of "tu" already showed a deference on his part which Moslems are scarcely accustomed to receive from Christians.

So I looked at him as if he had been the Angel of the Miracle, although he was not remarkably handsome, particularly for those who do not know how to use their eyes.

Charles was considerably shorter than I, slender and frail, with reddish hair and what looked like flecks of sunlight on his very fair skin. His eyes were concealed behind glasses.

He suffered from a timidity which—even more than his short-sightedness—sometimes gave him a distracted look. But when his intelligence shone in his face, you had an entirely different boy before you.

We chattered gaily, meanwhile smoking some cigarettes which he had also brought with him, and Makluf went to get us a bottle of cold frothy lemonade, which we downed as if it had been champagne, and got drunk on words.

It was truly a day among days . . .

It appeared that Charles had felt a spontaneous liking for me.

I could not say as much, for I must admit that I had not honored him with a single glance during that first month of almost continual contact in our classrooms.

Although, during school hours, we sons of Islam appeared to be mingled with the Christian pupils, we did our utmost to show that we were entirely uninterested in them—if for no

other reason, then to avoid the demonstration of disdain which the least attempt at friendliness on our part would have given them an opportunity to indulge in.

People of good family are always more courteous than people of low origin. Charles was what we call "a Frenchman of the old stock."

He had also not been long in Algeria, and he was curious about the world of Islam instead of appearing to disdain it, as was the case with many families who had lived here for several generations.

It is only fair to admit that our manner of conducting ourselves toward the latter was sufficiently absurd. And that we returned their ignorance with an equal measure of incomprehension.

In the last analysis, such things only serve to perpetuate a misunderstanding which is equally bad for both sides.

When he arrived, Charles had no idea that such a state of mind could exist, and when he found that it was so, he did his best to remedy it. His prestige in the school was enormous. He was a most likeable and most generous boy and by far the best pupil in the school.

For study and learning he had a passion which the years only increased, instead of weakening it and extinguishing it, as usually happens to the physical passions.

In that and in many other respects he had an extremely good influence on me. And he seemed so certain of the high value of our ancient civilization that I was really forced to make myself into somewhat less of a savage in order that I should resemble the ideal portrait which he had conceived of us.

Because of Charles, I learned to blow my nose into a piece of cloth and then to put the soiled cloth into my pocket, instead of getting rid of my snot for good by blowing it on to the ground.

Because of Charles, I consented to put up with a stiff collar and became skillful at knotting neckties.

Because of Charles, I learned to think of Christians in a less prejudiced way, and even sometimes in a conciliatory spirit.

For, on our holiday excursions, we usually talked about serious things while we walked in the Sahel, which is very near to La Bouzaréa. Here Charles had quickly found and recognized a moderation which suited the equilibrium of his spirit, the attractive gentleness of his own culture.

In the Sahel, there is nothing violent, savage, or too grandiose, as there is in so many other African landscapes. On the horizon, the distant line of the blue mountains; around you and before your eyes, a favored land, scattered with prosperous orchards, with vineyards loaded with grapes, with gardens which are in flower all year around. Here and there, on a gentle rise, a Moorish farm, with arcades borne on stucco pillars like a cloister. All a pure white; for contrast, the violent flame of a geranium. There are fig trees too for shade, a little donkey circling the *noria* which serves to raise water. And in the fields, the red of a poppy or a *sheshiya*.

The most perfect courtesy reigned in the Sahel. Words of welcome rise naturally to men's lips in such a favored country.

The Moslem farmers whom we met were glad to exchange a few words with the two young wanderers, one of whom was visibly a fellow believer and the other a sort of unexpected friend.

I found some Kabyles there, old mountaineers who had little by little grown accustomed to the mildness of the plains . . . Some of them were mere day-laborers. Others, more emancipated—the "*khammes*" \*—managed estates which had been the property of Christians since 1830.

\* Estate managers under the Turkish domination. The caste was perpetuated after the French conquest.

I had only to introduce myself to them as the son of my venerated father, and they at once made us enter their houses, after having warned their women to hide or to go elsewhere.

Then there were presents of fruit, flowers, sweetmeats, at-tar of roses—in short all that one does in Islam to honor a man whom one thinks worthy of honor, without the least idea of ever gaining any personal profit thereby.

Charles was delighted at finding himself in such a world.

Afterward, I would let him go decently back to school. While I, pretending that I had to visit my brother, would set out for Baya's house.

C H A P T E R

♦ I I ♦

**B**AYA, on that eighth morning, just before I set out for the Normal School, had generously said:

“Although your pocket is empty now, come back all the same . . . I write very badly [in fact she could not write at all], and there are matters which it is unpleasant to entrust to public scribes, in spite of their professional discretion . . .”

Although she had spoken that last sentence in a cooing voice (she managed the music of her voice with great artistry), it was not, as my readers may think, her love affairs to which she was referring, but her dealings with the bank . . .

She added:

“You might even play the flute in my orchestra sometimes . . . And to judge by what you sung to me when we were alone [during the last night I finally found the courage to recite her the poem which I had composed in her honor long before and which I had greatly enriched since I had the pleasure of knowing her], I think you might be able to give

some good ideas to the men who sing my praises at the docks whenever a foreign boat comes in."

In the course of my relations with Baya, I was to fill even stranger jobs than those of accountant, secretary, musician, and chief of publicity . . . But even then I promised to do whatever she wanted, and not long afterward, when she needed a watch-dog, I wrote to my master and asked him to send me Cirta.

Before long Cirta was playing the role of messenger between the Kasbah and the Normal School. Otherwise, Baya would have had to turn to someone to write to me; and even supposing that the porter had not opened them all, he would at least have been astonished to see me receiving so many letters from Algiers.

Whereas no one ever seemed surprised that my dog should often come to see me, and no one ever noticed that, each time, she carried a silk thread firmly tied to her collar—a silk thread whose color varied according to the day which Baya thus appointed for a meeting.

I cannot really remember now whether red meant:

"Come Wednesday."

And green:

"I expect you Saturday or Monday."

I only know that I thought every color was miraculous, because it brought me to Baya's feet.

It had been agreed that if I could not arrange to be free, I would leave the thread tied to Cirta's collar. But that never happened.

Because Doctor Ahmed ben Ahmed Shelif was supposed to be acting as my mentor, I had the pleasure, every weekend and every legal holiday, of receiving a pass to leave the school, duly stamped by the Director and countersigned by the Old Monkey himself.



The idea originated with Papaluet, who had managed to obtain some stationery with my brother's office letterhead.

As for my brother's handwriting, as no one at the school had ever seen it, it was no great job for me to imitate it.

On the other nights of the week, liberty became a matter of courage, and neither Belkasim nor I were lacking in courage.

We had not long been able to content ourselves with breathing the night air through an open window . . .

Growing bolder, we had advanced from the landing to the stairway, from the stairway to the garden. Once in the garden we were not going to stop because of the gate and the wall . . . If the gate was high, the wall was easy to climb, provided that one had a friend's strong shoulder for a mounting block, and here one did not lack assistants.

To get back in, you needed no one, for there was an extremely convenient milestone on the road.

In one of the numerous taverns in El-Biar, Belkasim had made the acquaintance of a Spanish maid who was not very pretty but who was extremely sensitive to the pleasures of love. So he had only a short distance to go before he was with her.

My way was much longer, in spite of the itinerary with which Makluf had obligingly provided me. But I had legs and wind.

The first few times, I had stupidly set off at a gallop. But it was not long before I realized that trotting is a gait it is more possible to maintain, and that, in the end, you make better time at it.

I must admit that I achieved these splendid results only by going barefoot. Ever since I had been at the school, the thing I had found most trying was being obliged to wear shoes. In Kabylia, when I was not barefoot, I would have on

soft *babushs*. Here, to avoid being taken for a rustic, I had to endure the continual torture of boots.

So at night, as I trotted over the slopes which lead from El-Biar to the Kasbah, I carried my shoes tied round my neck by their leather laces. Those wild, barefoot runs in the open gave me an intense pleasure, compounded from thoughts of impossible adventures and a miraculous liberty, as in the days when our country knew neither complicated modern machines nor Christians to force us to the drudgery of using them.

I reached my goal . . . I entered the patio . . . Cirta covered me with caresses, whimpering more tenderly than a woman . . . The girls received me with the most propitious formulas of benediction . . . I removed my tailored suit and put on a *gandurah* \* . . . eased my feet into slippers of *filali*. If there were wreaths of fresh flowers about, I put one on my head and one around my neck. . . . In a copper basin heaped with fruit, a pomegranate offered its rosy heart stuck with innumerable black seeds. . . . The air was fragrant with the odor of incense burning in brasiers . . . The musicians had a repertory of the most beautiful Andalusian airs, which the Moors brought back from the Spain which they had long held in subjection . . . The ardor for life which they aroused in me was the most beautiful thing in the world . . .

Baya had been wise enough to give her house an atmosphere that allowed men to forget the unpleasantness of life outside, which had become so difficult for Moslems ever since the world's merchants had brought North Africa their mania for speed and their ceaseless urge to use the noblest things calculatingly and to put price tags on them.

Each of Baya's guests was assured of finding absolute discretion in her house. Her dancers were famous for their decency and modesty.

\* A loose sleeveless shirt, reaching below the knees.

Baya also had a very good cellar. Her champagne was excellent. And when one is a prominent personage, it is better never to show oneself in a state of obvious inebrity before the faithful, Moslem or Christian.

That is why the Kaid of the Beni-Unif and Monsieur Ferdinand frequently met at Baya's on the pretext of playing chess.

The Kaid of the Beni-Unif claimed descent from our Prophet Mohammed. Whether this was true or not, as such he was an object of veneration to many Arab tribes, who also paid him large sums of money by way of alms.

Monsieur Ferdinand, on the other hand (his real name would add nothing to the interest of this narrative), reigned over the horde of minor officials employed by the General Government of French Algeria.

) (

While, seated opposite to one another, they were supposed to be playing chess, it was my duty to pour for them.

I had quickly become adept at opening a bottle of champagne silently, and my presence was not as likely to distract them as that of a woman would have been.

But M. Ferdinand, if he loved champagne, loved poetry too. When he had drunk enough, he recited verses. He had a well-stored memory and knew his classics perfectly. Sometimes I would silently go on where he had left off, for if I had done it aloud he would doubtless have found matter for suspicion in the fact that a mere Kabyle flute-player knew Racine, Molière, Victor Hugo, and others besides.

Yet I could not refrain (it was less dangerous, however) from singing him a few little Kabyle things. He liked them. And after that he sometimes called me his little Vergil.

Not long afterward, I had the good fortune to render him a real service.

I found some papers which had slipped out of his coat pocket onto the floor. Without saying a word to Baya—whose avarice was always to be feared—I stowed them between my skin and my shirt and on the following day—which was a Thursday \*—I took them to M. Ferdinand's house.

He wanted to give me a large sum of money as a reward. But I refused it, asking him only to keep a place for me in his memory against the day when I might perhaps need his patronage.

) (

I should probably have reached the point of thinking my geography course one of the most painful duties in my life had it not been that at Baya's I encountered so many Dutchmen, Scandinavians, Americans, men from every quarter of the globe—watched them, listened to them, brushed past them, sometimes even put my arms around them.

For it would happen that one or another of them would get so drunk that Baya had to call me and one of the musicians in—to lay them on a bed if their pockets were still full, or to throw them out into the gutter if they had spent all their money.

But before that, hours had passed. And in those hours, little by little, they had lost their proud insolence, dropped their haughty self-sufficiency, broken the dignity of their silence, and thus, suddenly and strangely, decreased the enormous, the inhuman distance which until then had separated me from them and prevented me from admitting that they really existed.

Now they were there before me, and I spied on their secrets, those secrets that men blab at dawn, when they succumb to their fatigue and to their need to share the burden of their torments, it matters not with whom . . .

\* Thursday is a school holiday in France and its colonies.—Tr.

You would think that they were only opening their mouths to yawn, but out of their mouths dropped words which evoked ridiculous or poignant pictures, in a sort of international lingua franca . . .

And thus gradually—thanks to these debauchees so miraculously brought to me—I began to work feverishly at geography, so that I could read a map and find the places—Batavia, Shanghai, Ceylon—from which they had come to me yesterday and would come to me tomorrow. And I also made such surprising progress in modern languages that my teachers could only explain it by an astonishing proclivity of the Kabyle race for linguistics. One of our professors even wrote a thesis on the subject later.

But when, encouraged by this first success, I wanted to go on and tell my teachers a few of the anecdotes which I had also collected from the mouths of my foreigners at hours when they were not yet drunk enough to wander in their speech, they set it down to my Oriental imagination and laughed at me. The more fools they!

It is useless to insist when one cannot produce proofs and cite one's sources. That I really could not do. So I did not insist.

The end of my first year at Normal School was approaching. For the moment, that was what most interested me.

At the thought of returning to my *duar*, of soon walking in freedom over the roads of the *bled*, barefoot, wearing a *gandurah*, I felt my heart swell with joy.

I also looked forward to doing the honors of Kabylia to my friend Charles. And when we took leave of each other, in July 1914, it was with the hope of meeting again at my father's house about the middle of August.

On the happy threshold of my vacation, my only regret was that it entailed a long separation from Baya . . . Although

in my relation with her I was still in the same condition of unsatisfied desire . . .

But her young companions were not cruel to me. And sometimes one of them would happen to wear one of her beautiful mistresses' old dresses . . . There was always a trace of her perfume clinging to it . . .

So—I closed my eyes . . . I inhaled the perfume . . .

When one is as young as I was then, it does not take much to make one suddenly happy!

## • I 2 •

WHEN I arrived at the *duar*, I found my master there. He was in such a state of uneasiness over the threat of war, that he thought nothing of taking the long walk to the nearest town every day to read the papers. But every day the papers, instead of reassuring us, only showed us that war was more and more imminent.

My brother Ali obtained a short special leave and came to see us soon after the grand fantasia of July 14th. In case of mobilization, it was said that his regiment would leave for France immediately. His wife was big with her second child—in which state she seemed totally incapable of understanding anything beyond the limits of her stomach. My mother's attitude was such as became a woman of Kabylia, which had once been so warlike.

"Go," she said, "and let the world, which has forgotten us, see what we still are. All is written! . . . God already knows that you will come back. But I shall pray to Him every day, so that He may not forget."

Ali left, loaded with all kinds of presents, blessed by the wise men of our clan, accompanied by the strident *yus-yus* of our women. As for me, I went to the station with him, both to help him carry his *barda* and in order to remain with him as long as possible.

As we walked along the road, each step taking us farther from the women's strident cries, he suddenly said to me:

"Listen carefully, Mourad, and remember my words, whatever anyone else may say to you later . . . Always keep out of the battle, for your business is not fighting, it is to become a *taleb* as quickly as possible, for the good of us all. And it is not shameful for a scholar to withdraw from the battle, for the Koran itself says:

"On the Day of Judgment, the ink of the sages will outweigh the powder of the warriors."

"Our father is old . . . Our brother is unworthy." (I had told him in what sort of company Ahmed was living . . .) "So it may come about that the son who is mine and the son who is soon to be mine—if it please God—will have great need of your wisdom . . . If you promise to watch over them, I shall go to war with an easier mind."

I gave him my promise, and then for the rest of the way we did not speak again, satisfied at being deeply aware of the affection which we felt for one another, and admiring the landscape of Kabylia in all its beauty—its sweep, the bounty and the variety of its crops.

And then the train whistled and I made a last salutation to Ali, who was standing by the door, smiling and magnificent in his light-blue uniform with decorations the very color of the sun.

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In August war was declared, my brother sailed for France. My master, mobilized in the auxiliary service, had to go to Batna.



There was talk of closing his school, where he was of the utmost use, whereas in barracks he had to content himself, as he said, with sweeping the floor while waiting until it should be time to feed the stoves!

He took it philosophically, and his letters were most amusing.

We spent the month of September in cruel uncertainty. The only news which came from the battlefields was confused and contradictory.

At the end of September, while the Battle of the Marne was being fought, I set out for Algiers. As soon as I arrived, I went to see what had become of Baya, from whom I had had no news during my vacation.

Neither the war, nor my brother's departure, nor the thought of the disaster which hung over us had been able to turn my thoughts from her.

The world could have been destroyed, and I should not have ceased to desire Baya.

I found her in a very bad humor. She believed that France was lost, and she was uneasy about certain investments—a matter as important in her eyes as the death of a lover or the ruin of one's country are to others.

In the deserted patio, the girls were yawning with boredom. No boats filled with tourists touched at Algiers now. And most of Baya's regular clients refrained from coming to such an expensive house—some because they were mobilized and far away, others probably because, like Baya, they feared for their investments in these uncertain early days of the war and preferred to hold onto their douros.

However, the other houses in the vicinity were full of noise and activity.

The barracks of Algiers are situated above the Kasbah. They were bursting with men waiting their turn to leave, and who every night, as soon as they were free, made their

way down to the hot streets to take advantage of the little time they had left to live.

But they were only common soldiers, and Baya's house would not open its doors to a man who had neither money nor stripes.

I had brought Cirta back with me. Baya did not even want to keep her, insisting that she had no use for her for the time being and that it cost too much to feed her.

To tell the truth—however unpleasant it may be for my self-esteem—she turned us both out quite rudely.

Not to speak of my grief, I now had the problem of disposing of Cirta. But Papaluet immediately offered to take her in, saying enthusiastically:

"*Dio Cane!* She looks like a she-lion! Ah ya-yaie! Holy Virgin! What jaws you have, my beauty! A beast like that is better than a revolver to keep the till safe while you turn your back to wait on customers. . . . The way they come and go—it makes me dizzy. But there you are! Did you notice what I've been doing to bring them in?"

He had put up maps and a portrait of Joffre on the walls. And he had bought a phonograph which played the *Marseillaise*, *Sambre-et-Meuse*, and other military classics.

He was pitiless on the subject of young men who were not yet wearing khaki or horizon-blue. But when I said:

"Then, according to you, I ought to enlist too, in spite of what my brother said . . ."

He opened his eyes wide and said angrily:

"Ho! What are you talking about? Are you crazy? If you go, I'll die! Why, you're like my son! And after all, there have to be a few kids around! And why shouldn't you be one of them . . . Let the rest of them do what they like—it's none of your business!"

By "the rest of them," he meant those of my schoolmates

who had been called up when mobilization began or who had enlisted immediately.

Belkasim had been one of the first to volunteer, joyously catching at this method of escaping from the martyrdom of an enforced education.

As for Charles, the board had rejected him for the time being, because he had weak lungs. At first he had seemed to consider it a humiliation. . . . But I repeated my brother's words concerning the duty of a scholar, and they consoled him.

Soon we learned of the victory of the Marne. And I rejoiced like everyone else—little suspecting what it had cost the Ben Ahmed Shelifs. For the news of the heroic death of my brother Ali did not reach us until about the time of the Christian Christmas. ( A second son had been born to him. He had not lived long enough to know it.)

I at once left for Kabylia, to share my family's grief.

My mother's suffering, which was so intense that she cried out anew each morning when she woke and returned to the consciousness that she had lost her son . . . The dumb despair of my father, who seemed to have grown even thinner . . . The solemn silence of the *duar*, trying, it seemed, not to offend such cruel grief by a single sound. . . . And Cirta howling at nightfall every evening, while those who could speak tried to raise their prayers to God, Who alone can understand and interpret all things, the murmurings of men as well as the howling of dogs . . . It all created such an oppressive atmosphere that I can still feel the weight of it whenever I recollect it.

Zina did what she could, going from one to another with her gentle face, her honeyed words. Each time she looked at me she seemed to be saying:

"Thank God, you are alive! You!"

Even the wisest virgin can be persuaded to give all under

such circumstances, and the thought of death fired me with the most violent desire to live and to transmit my life.

Nevertheless I went back to school leaving Zina as I had found her.

At school I encountered an atmosphere of exceptional cordiality. My brother's sacrifice seemed at last to have leveled differences of station. The Battle of the Marne had saved France, Ali had paid for the victory with his life . . . As a result, I found myself surrounded by the gratitude of the better sort and the politeness of the rest.

One must learn to remember such things, even after the benefit from them has long since evaporated . . .

) (

I returned to Kabylia for Easter. Spring was at its height, and spring, like hashish, has the power momentarily to obliterate the worst woes of this world.

My mother could not prevent a radiant sun from lighting her face, though it was swollen with weeping. Zina took her outdoors as often as possible and put Ali's two sons—Rassim and Mohammed—on her knees. They were so beautiful that no one could long refuse to smile at them.

Ayesha, their mother, had already relapsed into the passivity and gluttony from which no man was ever again to distract her.

My father, my brother Omar, and even little Lakdar were afield. For nature pays no heed to the mourning of men, and thus work forces you to forget the trouble of your heart.

Somewhat reassured in regard to my family, as soon as I returned to the city I had the happy surprise of finding my master there.

Although he was no longer young and had never been robust—in consequence of the privations of his youth—he had been immediately assigned to active service and sent to

join a regiment of Zouaves stationed in the Orléans Barracks, which are at the summit of the Kasbah.

At first, I was delighted by his being attached to this regiment, which permitted me to see him frequently. And in spite of my grief for my brother, those were happy and sometimes joyous days. For the meetings between my master and Papaluet were picturesque occasions of cordiality and good humor.

But after barely two months of training, the Zouave regiment was ordered to go into battle in the East, for the English had decided to attempt the Dardanelles expedition. And my master at once considered it impossible for him to go to fight people whom he regarded as his brothers.

His fondness for the Turks was no new thing. It dated from his youth, when he had read Loti's novels; it had been strengthened since, during the time when he was living as a brother with us Moslems of North Africa.

He therefore did all that he could honorably do to avoid acting in contradiction to his feelings and asked to be sent to fight on some other front instead.

But it was more than difficult for most people here to admit that a Christian could have such scruples against killing Moslems. It seemed to be the general opinion that he had raised this conscientious objection only to gain time and eventually to escape fighting on any front.

Consequently, to avoid the appearance of cowardice, my master had to leave for the Dardanelles.

He embarked one night (transports sailed at night if possible, to avoid the most serious risks of being torpedoed), and I, with my Cirta, went as far as the dock to bid him farewell.

It was the end of May. The sky was wonderfully clear. When I arrived, a little daylight still lingered.

From the ship came the laughter and singing of the men who had already gone on board.

On the dock, women were weeping, almost silently.

Soon the order was given for late-comers to go aboard, and then my master took me in his arms and said:

"If I do not come back, Mourad, keep a place for me in your memory. And, if it may be, see that the people speak of me sometimes in your *duar* for yet a while, for I loved you all . . ."

My voice choked as I tried to tell him what his friendship, his loyalty, his kindness, had meant to us too. But I could not go on, sobs closed my throat, and it is not fitting that a boy should give way to despair in a crowd, in the presence of warriors.

Then Cirta began whimpering. It seemed that she was crying in my stead. My master bent and softly caressed her muzzle, then he climbed the gangplank.

I remained on the dock as long as I could make out his form.

I did not leave until the moment of sailing, when he had become indistinguishable in the darkness and already almost lost in absence.

He had no sooner left than I began to wait for his return . . .

Then the weeks passed, bringing me a number of post-cards which he had mailed at his various ports . . .

"Egypt . . . Italy . . . Greece . . . What a journey, if horror were not awaiting him at the end of it!"

He also sent me some amusing accounts of "fueling duty" and other incidents of the voyage.

Then came a long month of silence. It was the more terrible because the rumors which were circulating were not good, and for once they were true.

My master had the luck to escape from the slaughter of

the Dardanelles. How I had prayed to our God that he might! And suddenly, in quick succession, I received two long letters from him which seemed to have been opened.

I attached no particular importance to the fact, thinking that the porter at the Normal School had once again felt the urge to pry into things which did not concern him.

The two letters enthusiastically praised the great courtesy of the Turks and their chivalrous behavior in battle.

Rather less than forty-eight hours after they arrived, I was summoned to appear before a committee of inquiry and was exhaustively interrogated on the subject of the dealings I was supposed to be having with the enemy through the instrumentality of a certain Émile Stiévenart, attached to the Army of the East.

After having recited my surname and given names, my age and civil status, I had to try to make the intolerant members of the committee comprehend that Émile Stiévenart could love the Turks—as the letters intercepted by the censorship bore witness that he did—without at the same time being a traitor to France, his country. The latter having only decided to fight the Turks a few months ago, whereas Émile Stiévenart had loved them for more than twenty years.

But the committee regarded this remark as intolerably cynical, and I do not know what would have happened to me nor what the upshot of the inquiry would have been, had not my master soon after been severely wounded, in the course of a new and terrible battle, while saving his regiment's flag.

An accusation of high treason became impossible against a man who had behaved in such a fashion and had even left his right arm on the battlefield.

I learned of his terrible sacrifice by a brief telegram dispatched from Toulon, where it appeared that the boat which was bringing him back had touched. And on the following

day I paid my second visit to the dock on which, two months earlier, I had taken leave of my master as a well man with all his limbs and all his faculties.

When the ship docked, I was as near as possible to the gangplank, thanks to the kindness of a Kabyle medical orderly, who had taken it upon himself to station me among the officials.

My master was the last to appear—I had already begun to feel a horrible fear that he had succumbed on the voyage.

Although he was extremely pale, his eyes were as bright as ever, and he found the heart to smile at me.

I bent to kiss his hand; then, walking beside his stretcher, I kept his hand in mine, in order to transmit my strength and my love to him, as I had seen my mother do long ago to revive my dying Aunt Zohra.

But I was not allowed to accompany my wounded master as long and as far as I would have wished . . . If I was his son at heart, I was not one of his actual family.

Two days later, I at last received permission to visit him in the hospital. It was just in time, for he had become much weaker and a blood transfusion was considered necessary. After a consultation on the part of the *tubibs* in charge, I was accorded the honor of giving my blood to save the man who had put his knowledge into my head and given his heart to those of my faith.

Thus we became even more like relatives.

A month later he was able to leave the hospital. He was still weak, but his wound no longer required dressing. So there was nothing to prevent his leaving for Kabylia, where the pure air would set him up again better than anything else. And I could go with him, for vacation time had come.

The only difficulty was to find some way for him to travel which would be more comfortable than the train, for trains were more crowded than ever before. And neither my mas-



ter nor I was rich enough to afford the luxury of hiring an automobile.

It was Papaluet who came to our rescue.

"There, there!" he said. "Sooner or later, some day I must buy a car . . . If not, what will I do with all the money I'm making? Pay taxes? Not on your life!"

My memory of our journey is a delight . . .

Papaluet's car was well sprung, well upholstered, and loaded with an ample supply of foodstuffs. Furthermore, it was painted a sunrise color which could not pass unnoticed in the towns and villages through which we rolled in glory, and its Klaxon was even more powerful than the vocal chords of our chauffeur, who entertained us all through the trip with extraordinary songs collected from Mediterranean folklore.

The journey seemed far too short to all of us.

The *duar* gave us the reception which one might imagine, and my mother herself, despite her grieving heart, was not chary of *yus-yus* to greet such a home-coming. And when to her *yus-yus* there were added the strident tones of our automobile horn and the answering chorus of the *duar* dogs, the noise was worse than thunder.

) (

My master had soon recovered his strength, thanks to the tonic air of our mountains.

As to his state of mind, it had been of the happiest ever since the loss of his arm had at last freed him from the fear of involuntarily killing one of his friends.

As soon as his health permitted, he set himself to teaching his left hand to do the things which his right had previously done.

At this time Zina was a great help to him, as she had already

undergone the same experience. But he was much less adroit than she and also much less patient.

Evenings, the men of the *duar* would gather around us to hear him tell of his long voyage to the distant East, the joy and the quiet of its ports, the threat of torpedoes and the continual alarms along the sea lanes, the even greater difficulty of a disembarkation on an unknown shore under bursting projectiles of every caliber . . . The honorably kept truces which allowed the wounded to be cared for and the dead to be buried . . . And, finally, how he had managed not to kill anyone and even to save the lives of **several Turks** merely taking them prisoner, which had been hard to do because of their valor and the consequent risk of their bayonetting you first.

No one ever tired of hearing such things told by a man of such sanctity.

Because, for our people, his clemency toward the Turks, since it was not cowardice, could only be the sort of supernatural courage which marks those who walk unarmed through the worst dangers and are the chosen of God.

So now when the people of our village spoke of him among themselves, they no longer called him *Sidi* (Mr.), but *Sidna*—that is Lord—Stiv'nart . . .



P A R T

♦ 3 ♦



## · I 3 ·

THE scholastic year 1915-16 was a studious one for me.

I had not gone back to Baya's since she had so rudely turned us out, my dog and myself. I even thought that I had made up my mind never to see her again.

However, I went to the Kasbah now and again to straighten out Papaluet's accounts.

I took long walks with Charles in the forest of Bainem, which runs down from La Bouzaréa to the sea; we glimpsed it through the trees at every turn of the road.

I also discovered sports.

There had recently come to the school a young professor, who had been invalidated home after a period at the front had more or less ruined his health. Nevertheless, he taught us the game of soccer, which he had long played, and trained us as well as he could. I soon became a very good player. But the sport I was best at was running.

All this outdoor exercise made me sleep soundly. Now I

slept on my mountainous bed as if it were a mat spread on the ground after the Kabyle fashion.

Two years of living at school had disciplined me. I was almost comfortable in my tight clothes, and I succeeded quite well in imitating the best kind of French manners.

Only wearing shoes still tortured me. But Charles assured me that this was no proof of barbarism, since he himself, not being rich enough to have his shoes made to order, suffered cruelly each time that he had to break in a new pair.

However, it had never even occurred to him to go barefoot to avoid this useless suffering, whereas I still often found myself irritated by the recollection of the wind passing between my bare toes and by the desire to feel once again the unctuousness of good rain-soaked soil under my feet.

But I did not admit it, even to him.

That year I answered my master's letters quite regularly, and Zina's too.

My master had bought a typewriter, which spared his remaining hand much labor and fatigue.

He had resumed his post in his school, much to everyone's satisfaction. However, he still suffered from his wound when there was a change in the weather. At such times, he said, it was as if his missing arm were again hanging at his side, with its burning wound, with its enormous weight, just as he had felt it at the moment he had suffered disfigurement.

As for Zina, she assured me that she never stopped thinking of the happy life she would soon be leading: "when I shall be the wife of Mourad the schoolteacher."

The following year, after we had spent another tender but still chaste vacation together, she was bold enough to write me: "At last! now the fingers of my two hands, and mere months, are enough for me to count the little time which separates me from the day when you shall have become the Master of all and are ready too to be Mine."

I began the last year of the studies which would fit me to be a teacher somewhere, preferably in the *bled*.

Zina and I were in agreement on that point: the Kabyle countryside, which had given birth to our love, should see it flourish.

But God seldom permits us to settle the future without his consent, and we were imprudent enough to talk too loudly of our plans, with the result that Mariam, Zina's mother, heard us.

Why should we have distrusted her? Until now she had been on the whole favorable to our love . . . Yet from that moment she made every effort to destroy it.

I have already said that Mariam's regret for the amusing and luxurious life of a city was so great that she carried a snapshot of Miliana over her heart.

She thought that, since I had had the luck to spend my school years in the capital of Algeria, I would later make every effort to settle there.

Whereupon she too, upon one pretext or another (a daughter always needs her mother, especially when children are coming), would come to live in our house, that is, in a city.

When Mariam heard from our own mouths our plan of settling in the *bled*, which ruined her edifice of patient and visionary hopes, she conceived a rancor which was soon transformed into diabolical anger.

From anger to treachery is a short step.

She was soon to take it.

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I returned to the Normal School in October, 1916, feeling rather melancholy, partly because I was leaving Zina but principally because I did not like returning to the solitude of a place from which Charles would now be absent.

The French pupils—or those who claimed to be such on the



grounds that their own parents were naturalized—spent only three years at Normal School, whereas Moslems, without any exception, even if they were the most brilliant of students, had to remain for an additional year in a special class.

Consequently, Charles had finished his course the previous June, and so brilliantly that he had immediately been given a post in the school at Maison-Carré.

Maison-Carré is west of Algiers and immediately on its outskirts. This proximity to the great city and its universities would permit my friend to pursue graduate studies which should later fit him to teach in a secondary school.

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As the crow flies, it is barely ten miles from Maison-Carré to La Bouzaréa. At that period, however, means of transportation between them were so ill-calculated that it took as much time to travel from one to the other as it would to go on a real journey.

Charles and I did not always have the four or five hours required for a round trip. So we could not meet as often as we wished, nor as often as was necessary for his good influence over me to prevail.

Yet until November all went well. Even so, I wandered about the Kasbah far more often than need be, passing back and forth in front of Baya's house in the unacknowledged hope that the Negress would see me and call out: "Come in!"

As that never happened, I made my way to Papaluet's establishment, where I was sure that both I and my dog would be given a good reception.

Cirta had set about populating the Kasbah with a race of Kabyle sheepdogs which were one day to arouse a certain terror among the lowly, and even among the police.

As for Papaluet, he was doing a wonderful business.

Once the initial period of fear had passed, those who were

already rich had settled comfortably into the new state of things. Those who were not yet rich made every effort to become so, as quickly as possible, in their turn.

Algiers was far from the scene of military operations . . . Algeria was able to furnish the distant combatants—and even certain others—with numerous things which were good to eat and good to drink.

Papaluet was talking of buying a country estate.

He was now dealing in all sorts of different commodities, and making profits on them compared to which the profits from his café seemed insignificant, although from dawn to dark he was serving food and drink, especially now that he was selling anisette surreptitiously.

Algerian anisette is a beverage of high alcoholic content resembling Spanish aguardiente as well as absinthe.

Its consumption had recently been prohibited in Algeria, with the immediate result of tremendously increasing its price without stopping anyone from drinking it.

For revenue agents, when they were not conniving with the bootleggers, were almost always too slow and too stupid to catch them.

At Papaluet's it was Cirta who had the honor of outwitting their watchfulness. She did it in a manner which gave Papaluet deep satisfaction:

"You ought to see her—it's killing. Before they get round the corner, she smells 'em, she goes Wow! Wow! Then quick under the tap with our glasses of you know what. And when they come in, all they find us doing is drinking Quinquina—like a bunch of nice young ladies!"

A few weeks went by, during which I used my time fairly sensibly.

Then came November 15th, on which date the best native football players at the Normal School had been invited to a place near Algiers (better for local pride that I do not men-

tion its name!) to play a match with the local club, which was made up of young Frenchmen who had the reputation of being unbeatable.

Our team contained a large majority of Moslems. It committed the error of winning an overwhelming victory—12 to 2. The sons of the vanquished are not supposed to do such things—unless, of course, their opponents happen to be well-bred people like Charles or my master. And such was not the case.

As a result, the umpire was almost killed . . . And we had to leave the field under a barrage of spit, insults, and even stones.

After that, the reigning Governor-General forbade games between mixed teams for a time.

As for me, I swore never to play soccer again as long as I lived, and I have kept my oath.

To be fair, I must admit that on the morning after the match one of the biggest Algerian newspapers publicly excoriated the conduct of the inhabitants of the place where we had played.

I should therefore have been glad not to resurrect this disgraceful incident. But its consequences were to have such an influence on my destiny that I find myself obliged to refer to it in order that my readers may understand the reasons for what I did during the hours and days immediately following.

On the evening after the match, after I had drunk a good deal at Papaluet's, I went and knocked at Baya's door and relapsed into debauchery. And I should have had to be a great philosopher to do otherwise—for I had just received unmistakable proof that, while my brother Ali had given his life in their cause and I myself was attempting to adopt all the refinements of their culture, certain *rumis* had not even learned the courtesy which one owes to one's guests, whatever their race may be.

Baya greeted me as if we had parted only the day before. Although her house was full of people, she devoted a few minutes of her conversation to me. Her patio had been replastered, and she was wearing jewelry which I had never seen on her before. But her clients appeared to be a very mixed lot . . . And among her dancers there were now a number of Christian girls.

In times past there was a great deal of talk about certain girls whom Barbary corsairs were supposed to have carried off from the coast of Provence from time to time and sold in the slave markets of El-Jezair (Algiers). The rumor is even said to have served, in 1830, as one of the principal pretexts for the capture of Algiers.

Beware of historians! For how is one to believe them when, a century later, under the rule of the Third Republic, so many Christian girls were publicly put up for sale in the Kasbah—and all without the intervention of a single Barbary corsair?

Baya asked me to return as often as possible to help out with her orchestra, and also to bring back Cirta.

If I was unable to grant her second request, since Papaluet was unwilling to let my dog go, I did not have the courage to refuse her the first—as, remembering her earlier disdain, I ought to have done.

So I returned to her house as often as she wanted me and did whatever she was pleased to ask of me.

At that time there was a fashion for discordant music which had to be played as loudly as possible. So that I found myself surrounded by a lot of strange instruments, whose names, at least in Africa, were entirely unknown.

I managed soon to make Baya admit that our Kabyle bagpipe, if played without restraint, could make a sufficiently horrible noise too, especially when it was supplemented by a furious accompaniment on the drum.

Thus I became the leader of a Moslem-style jazz band, with a skill which soon won the approval of certain other owners of dancing houses in the Kasbah, and even of the manager of a large dance hall in the French town—who offered to hire me at such a good salary that for a moment I hesitated between duty and pleasure.

Why should I not give up the obscure career of a teacher?

Papaluet undertook to pay the fine provided by law for anyone who should abandon a teaching career after having attended the Normal School.

However, I decided that I could not take such a daring step before completing my course. But then it was too late. Other musicians had taken all the good jobs.

It was written that I should be a teacher!

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There had been a gradual slackening of discipline at the Normal School as the war went on and on.

I did not have to jump the wall to go to visit Baya. The school gate was never closed . . . One day I met the Director on the road and boldly greeted him, pretending that a violent headache obliged me to take the air.

He appeared to believe me, though it was raining in torrents . . . It is true that his devotion to stones removed him from human realities.

As for me, nothing meant anything to me now that I saw the time approaching when Baya could no longer refuse herself to me. Because I should soon be in a position to pay as much as need be to possess her.

It often happened that one of her visitors, delighted by the vigor and imaginativeness of my accompaniments, would slip one or more bills into my hand.

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And Papaluet paid me generously for my services as his accountant.

I put it all away in the amulet which I always used as a safe, and my desire for the dancer was so great that it never even entered my mind to break into my wad of bills for any other purpose. Gradually it made quite a lump on my chest.

However, it turned out that I did not have to pay to possess Baya, and you might say that it was another woman's impatience which threw her into my arms.

To explain this, I must begin by admitting that the last letters I had received from my master had postscripts:

"Can't you find time to write to Zina?"

Since I had returned to the dancer's, I had completely neglected the most charming of girls. But I felt so sure that I would find her ready to take me back forever as soon as I had satisfied my mania for the other, that I rather thought she ought to have divined my state of mind and refrained from being so exigent as long as she was not my wife. And even then, she would have to be less possessive.

So I went on living with the feeling that nothing could catch up with me until, late one December afternoon, the Old Monkey sent for me to come to his office.

He usually took cases of capital punishment upon himself, for he considered the Director too conciliatory.

At the time, I supposed that the latter had perhaps reported our nocturnal encounter on the road and that the real purpose of my clandestine expedition had been discovered. And I was already preparing a brilliant defense when, entering the Old Monkey's office, I instantly saw that I would not need to use it.

He was smiling—or rather, he was making a face which he thought was pleasant—and he motioned to me to sit down opposite him and read the letter which he offered me, holding it in very long and very dirty fingernails.

The letter was from my Aunt Zohra. It was picturesquely phrased and justified the Old Monkey's amused smile.

The old lady said that she had the pleasure of announcing to

"His Honor the Chief of the Talebs of La Bouzaréa" her imminent arrival in the city of Algiers and begged him to communicate this happy event to her nephew and his pupil Mourad, if Mourad were still alive. If there was some doubt on the subject it was because Mourad had not written to his family for almost two months. But, in case he had miraculously survived, could he not be granted two or three days' leave? Because she who found herself obliged to dictate this letter to a public scribe encountered by hazard, had great need of the discreet and trustworthy assistance of a lettered relative to settle certain business matters in Algiers. She added that she expected to arrive at such and such a place, on such and such a day, at such and such an hour.

The letter had been delayed, so the Old Monkey said:

"Your aunt arrives this evening . . . You have just time. Stay with her as long as is necessary to settle the business to which she refers—in any case, the Christmas and New Year holidays are just about to begin."

I thanked him and set off at a run . . . As I ran, I asked myself whether I ought not to go by way of Baya's house and tell her that I should be free for two or three evenings in succession.

But I reckoned that my time was too short. And so it was, for when I arrived in the French town and reached the square which was the terminus of the red and gold motor busses which now connected Algiers and Great Kabylia more rapidly than the railroad, it was to embrace Aunt Zohra who, alternating cries of pleasure at seeing me with reproaches for my long neglect, ended by saying:

“And now you can help out your cousin.”

And in the tall figure, muffled in white and heavily veiled, which was leaning out of the bus, I recognized Zina.

For her eyes, bright between the folds of her veil, were like no one else's, and Moslems do not need to see a woman's whole face to recognize her unmistakably.



## ♦ I 4 ♦

I T was the first time that, seeing her again, I felt no pleasure. I may even say that I felt annoyed. An annoyance which I was still too young to be able to hide.

Just as she was too sensitive not to feel infinitely hurt by an ill humor to which I had never accustomed her.

But then why had she been impatient? When patience is the most necessary of all the virtues, especially for women!

In her defense I must say that, immediately after my departure, her mother had begun considering how to prevent her from marrying me, which would result in Mariam's being buried forever in the *bled*.

Without saying anything to Zina, whom she thought too far gone in love with me, Mariam had undertaken to set the matter before Aunt Zohra.

It had been an exceptionally beautiful autumn, so Aunt Zohra had prolonged her visit to us far beyond her usual time of departure.

Aunt Zohra was very fond of Mariam, who had always been most respectful and attentive to her. She therefore listened patiently while Mariam explained that her beloved daughter Zina was growing up and had even passed the age when our virgins are sacrificed to the needs of the race. Her uncertain health and the slightness of her figure had been the principal causes of the delay. But now that the charming girl had developed breasts, was it proper to keep putting off the business of finding her a good husband?

Aunt Zohra had then asked what might be preventing Zina from embracing such a happy fate.

Whereupon Mariam had said:

"Do you not see that Zina persists in thinking her cousin Mourad is going to marry her? And even if it were true—they are too closely related, and that is always bad for any children they might have! And they are almost the same age! It is only too true that women age twice as fast as men! My Zina will be toothless before Mourad is through cutting his wisdom teeth!"

(There was a certain amount of truth in this. I had sometimes feared it myself, but only passingly.)

She added—but this time untruthfully:

"Mourad does not even return my daughter's love for him. He merely amuses himself by making her trot around him like a goat on a tether. You know what these relations between cousins amount to—especially in the country where there is so little amusement!"

Aunt Zohra believed her, without inquiring into the matter. And then my unusual silence appeared to confirm Mariam's lies.

Among her many other roles, Aunt Zohra loved to play Providence, and our old women always have a prospective husband in reserve, preferably a rich one.

For they have had time to discover that money makes up

for a lot of things, and they prefer to forget that when they were young they too put money after love . . .

Aunt Zohra therefore assured Mariam that she would be able to provide Zina with a husband, right in Tunis.

The elder brother of the beautiful Aziba's husband had, it happened, recently become a widower. True enough, he had four grown sons from his first marriage and his beard was gray, but the disadvantage of his age was offset by his fortune and by his intelligence. He was well-read, sensible, and kindly. In short, though his health was poor, he still seemed capable of giving a young wife children.

Obviously, Tunis is rather far from Great Kabylia, but the man in question was sufficiently well-bred and cautious to be willing to take his wife's mother into his household.

On the other hand, here at home Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif did not need to have both his wives with him constantly.

Whereupon Mariam remarked that my father would hardly notice her absence because Khadija, my mother, would be so happy to have him back that she would take the utmost care of him.

After that the two conspirators tended and enlarged and ripened their fine scheme day by day. And in the rich soil of their desires it grew so fast that it soon became an imminent reality in their eyes.

It seems probable that Aunt Zohra too had gradually seen the advantage of enticing to Tunis two good-hearted creatures who could keep her company when her wonderful daughter Aziba was too busy with her husband and her children (she was now expecting her ninth child).

As for Zina, the project was explained to her rather differently:

"You are growing thin and pale, my beauty. I can see it—you are unhappy because Mourad does not write to you . . .

I shall soon be going back to Tunis . . . Would you like me to take you with me? We shall see Mourad on the way, and then again when I bring you home."

Zina was still only a troubled and jealous virgin. She would have needed to be a saint to refuse such a proposal.

And that was why she was there now before me—quite tongue-tied by my distant manner, and far too sensitive and modest to ask me the reason for it and to discuss marriage with a boy who appeared to have forgotten his promises.

And always, between us, there was Aunt Zohra, playing her part so thoroughly that, even if I had wanted to talk to Zina about what she had most at heart, I could not have found a minute in which to do it privately.

So the three days were days of constraint, filled with expensive amusements and perpetual excursions. For the time had to be gotten through somehow!

Like a guide for tourists, I took Zina and our aunt over Algiers from top to bottom and showed them all the things that I was supposed to know, but which I had never seen so thoroughly before because I had preferred to confine myself to the Kasbah.

The old woman had hired a carriage, which set out with us in the morning and did not bring us back until nightfall.

We went to see the Governor's summer and winter palaces, the Cathedral . . . Our Lady of Africa . . . the Museum . . . Several mosques. Two cemeteries . . . Three or four carpet factories . . . And innumerable fashionable shops in the French town.

The constraint of those days would have been tolerable if I had at least been able to make my escape at night. I had thought that I had assured myself of liberty by telling Aunt Zohra that I had to return to the school every evening, and the old lady had made no objection. But when, the first

evening, I was preparing to take leave of her, she shook her head:

"No, Mourad! I just telephoned the Director of your school. And he gives you full permission to spend your nights with us as well as your days."

I bowed, meanwhile thinking that, as soon as she went to bed, there would be nothing to prevent me from hurrying to Baya's house.

But it was utterly impossible.

Aunt Zohra had taken up her quarters at a large hotel which was far from the French town and even farther from the Kasbah. Despite my pointing out the inconvenience of this location, she had insisted upon remaining for a particular reason.

This first-class hotel received Moslems only if they were of exalted birth.

The old lady, giving out that she was related to a dignitary in the service of the Bey of Tunis, had obtained an apartment there. And she was not a little proud of the fact!

I must admit that I too found it quite agreeable to see Christians bowing before me at last, even if they were only valets, waiters, or chambermaids, and even though Aunt Zohra's liberal tips accounted for the greater part of their respectful attitude.

So I would have put up with the inconvenient location of our hotel, had not the arrangement of our apartment unbearably increased the disadvantage.

The apartment consisted of three rooms which gave onto one another. I was allotted the innermost room. I do not think that it was by chance. For I could not leave it without crossing the drawingroom, which was in the middle, and which in turn gave onto the room by which you entered the apartment and in which Zina and her watchful aunt slept.

As for getting out the window . . . We were on the fourth floor.

The first evening then, I resigned myself to going to bed early and spent part of the night planning a way to achieve freedom for the next day.

So, the second evening, we went to the opera—a result which I had brought about by telling Aunt Zohra what a great reputation *Faust* enjoyed among Christians and thus filling her with a desire to see it.

The opera house in Algiers is located at the foot of the Kasbah, and I had counted on running to visit Baya during one of the intermissions.

But during the first intermission the old lady demanded my moral support and the help of my arm for a visit to the foyer and so on.

When the second intermission arrived, she demanded to be taken back to the hotel at once . . . The play was indecent! . . . She must spare her niece's modesty! . . . And why were those people all singing at once? One couldn't understand a word . . . What a bore it was! . . . (She was yawning.)

And finally, when we were back in our apartment and I pretended that I must go out for cigarettes, she thought it preferable to send down for one of the luxurious brands available in the hotel.

The third evening was devoted to writing letters on stationery bearing the monogram of the hotel in which we were being suffered to reside (the letters being intended to astonish certain other old Tunisian ladies).

I had to write for two hours, although Zina—who divined my exasperation without divining the real reasons for it—offered to help too, but was refused.

Yet there was a moment when—either from weariness or from pity for the trouble which she saw in Zina's eyes—the old lady left us alone together on the balcony.

It was a warm and beautiful night. Sometimes the end of December in Algiers is as mild as the beginning of April elsewhere.

The wide balcony, level with the tree-tops of a magnificent garden, overlooked the sea and the harbor.

Zina had laid her little hand on my arm.

"O Mourad! How many stars there are! And how they shine when you are with me!"

Her eyes too shone like stars. I moved a little closer . . . I heard her heart beating . . . For a moment it seemed as if, in all the beauty of that night, we were close to reviving the sweet emotions of our youthful love.

But women always talk too much . . . Zina made the mistake of adding:

"Do you know what that ship is—the one with all the lights?"

It was one of the finest cruise ships I had ever seen. (Three funnels, several promenade decks.) And ever since it had dropped anchor the day before, Baya's house must have been full of people, and the patio must be waiting in vain for me to rouse its echoes with the savage music which was proper to such occasions.

When I thought of that, it seemed impossible that the dancer could ever forgive me for an absence which was so damaging to her interest.

I shook off Zina's arm, I re-entered my room.

Yet it was our last night.

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The Tunis express left Algiers at 8 P.M.

I got my two travelers there fifty minutes early, so that they could not possibly miss it.

And now at last they were sitting face to face in the best

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corners of the first-class compartment in which their places had been specially reserved.

I should probably have been quite proud of escorting two ladies who were able to travel in such expensive style, had not the thought that in a moment I should be in Baya's house filled me with a joy higher than all the pleasures of snobbery.

The idea made me impatient all through my body . . . I walked up and down the platform . . . I smiled in spite of myself . . .

Aunt Zohra, who was watching me, suddenly said severely:

"My boy, you seem so happy at last that I should like to get out of this train and benefit from the pleasure which you should have shown upon our arrival!"

I answered in embarrassment:

"Why shouldn't I be happy? . . . Aren't you and Zina both coming back soon—she on her way home and you traveling with her?"

"Who knows?" said she.

I took that for a bit of teasing merely meant to punish me a little.

Zina said nothing. She had put her little hand over her eyes and was crying behind it as unobtrusively as possible.

But that evening I would have made even my mother cry if it would have let me get away sooner to be with her for whom I could no longer bear to wait . . . Her from whom I had been craftily separated for three days, three nights . . .

Now I was only a raging stallion.

The train had not yet vanished on the horizon before I was outside the station and on my way . . . Quick, quick! And as I ran, I felt the thick wad of bills on my chest . . . Quick! Quick! If the bills were not enough, I would hire myself to Baya as a slave, for as long as she wished, to pay whatever price she set on her body . . . Out of the way! Out



of the way! In the Kasbah, people vanished from my path for fear of encountering my fists . . .

At last I reached her door . . . I knocked like a madman . . . The Negress opened . . . I pushed her away . . . I sprang into the patio . . . Baya stood before me . . . She seemed moved:

"O Mourad! You have come at last! . . . Where were you? I don't know how many times Cirta has gone looking for you. But you were never at school. Each time she came back with the thread still tied to her collar! . . . I know! You've been offered a lot of money to play in other houses . . . If you have already accepted, you might have told me . . . And if it isn't settled yet, tell me what you want? . . ."

I wanted nothing but her, and I had her . . . But not before I had satisfied the tourists from the big ship, who kept calling for music, music, music . . .

I played like a madman, and the madder I seemed, the more they shouted "Bravo!" and the more the money flowed from their hands into our pockets.

We had never made such a take.

A little later—while the ship, having gathered up its own, was putting out to sea—Baya at last became mine, or appeared to be mine . . .

At the same time, in the train to Tunis, Aunt Zohra was proving to Zina, who had cried all night, that my coldness was sufficient evidence that I had given up the idea of marrying her, though I still had not the courage to tell her so. And that, such being the case, there was no reason why she should refuse a suitable match if an offer were made for her—in Tunis, for example.

## ♦ I 5 ♦

YET my liaison with the dancer was to be very brief, and the little pleasure it gave me could never justify the price which Zina was to make me pay for my temporary infatuation.

Baya had been my mistress for scarcely a month when she began wanting to own—which in her case was synonymous with finding someone to give her—a phonograph of the latest model.

As her admirers were numerous, she soon had a phonograph. It was gigantic, ran by electricity, and made as much noise as an entire orchestra. One person was enough to keep it playing. A child could have operated it. The Negress soon learned.

So Baya no longer had any need for my services as a musician . . . And when Baya no longer needed someone, she soon let him know it—by yawning in his face to show him how much in the way he was.

Then she made the acquaintance of the Emir Rachid, and

at once appeared to devote herself exclusively to him, in the secret hope that he would make her his wife. She was merely his favorite for a short time. But even that was a not unenviable position.

The Emir Rachid had everything which makes a man loved by women and crowds.

He was young, rich, handsome, and a hero.

He had just returned from the front in France, where he had been wounded, and was spending his convalescent leave with us. (Among many other properties, he owned a magnificent estate close to Algiers.)

He was a true Moslem nobleman—majestic, glittering, proud, and incapable of deceit, pretence, duplicity, or baseness. Exactly the opposite of a Kaid of the Beni-Unif.

He was far too noble ever to stoop to ask a favor. He was proud enough to refuse anything that he thought beneath his dignity. He was generous enough to give everything without even being asked.

With his own money he had outfitted a *gum* of Arab cavalrymen so that he might defend the soil of France at their head, and his bravery had been such that he had won all the proudest citations.

Compared with this sun of glory, I was mere darkness, and not even that . . . A speck of nothingness! . . . A son of the dust! . . .

Without being ridiculous, I could not contend with him for Baya.

I was still less inclined to do so because possessing the dancer had proved a great disappointment to me . . .

Not that she was less beautiful seen close to and undressed than she was at a distance and clothed, but she conducted her love-making, especially when she was not being paid for it, with such utter indifference that, in the end, it became painful and even insulting . . .

And so it was, until the day when she encountered a certain Mohammed—whose origin was the gutter, who was young enough to be her son, and who aroused in her such a desire for his body that she gave him the management of her fortune.

At the time of which I am writing, I separated myself from her as discreetly as possible. Yet, even despite her coldness, I found it a hard thing to do. I left her house. And that was even harder, for it had long vibrated to the sound of my music and often echoed the cries which applauded my talents.

Yet the bitterness of my self-effacement was not without certain compensations.

One does not immediately precede such a man as the Emir Rachid, even if it is only in a woman's love, without acquiring a certain degree of fame.

Now when I went back and forth through the Kasbah, whispers and praise followed me:

"Look at him—over there. His name is Mourad, and . . ." (the rest is too flattering for me to report). But a few hundred years hence (for legends are long-lived in Islam) it may be that I shall always be remembered as: "He who was modest enough to give up his place in the bed of the most beautiful courtesan of his day to one of the great men of Our World."

I composed a song on the subject. It could not have been too bad, for those who station themselves in city squares and country crossroads to amuse people soon had it in their repertory.

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I had broken with Baya in February. In March—which, according to the astrologers, is the most ill-fated month of the year—I learned of Zina's marriage.

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The news came to me, without previous warning, in a letter from Aunt Zohra, dictated to her usual scribe, Jaffar. I recognized his handwriting despite the terrible consternation which I felt as soon as I began to read.

Ever since her visit to Algiers, I had had no word from her whom I always regarded as my betrothed. But her prolonged silence had not made me uneasy. It seemed quite natural that she should sulk a little. I had really been too sulky myself . . . But soon she would be coming back, and this time she would find a different reception . . . For, this time, there would be no one else in my mind and in my heart . . . And we would go shopping, and choose the material for the dress she would wear for our wedding—which would be soon . . . And some jewelry . . . As for imagining that she would permit herself to be given to another man! . . .

Yet here I was, in the school garden, reading just such a letter!

To fill the measure of Aunt Zohra's prudence and my horror, the letter had not been sent until after Zina's marriage had been celebrated . . .

It was all over! . . . No use to leave this garden—to go to Papaluet! Quick, quick! If you are my friend, give me money—I am going to Tunis!

It was absolutely like a nightmare . . . when an irresistible power paralyzes you . . . when an unexpected obstacle absurdly plants itself in front of you. . . .

But the letter in my hand was a reality . . .

I read it over. . . . So it was five days ago that Zina had married "a prominent Tunisian . . . older than herself . . . but still a fine man. . . . And rich enough to shower her with presents which will make her forget the disdain which a certain stupid young man too clearly showed for her, two moons ago."

Was it really two months since they had been in Algiers? Had I really behaved as badly as that?

Since my passion for Baya was satisfied, it was impossible for me to recapture the image of the mad boy, raging with desire, whom for that short time I had been.

And, as I read and reread Aunt Zohra's letter, I began to feel that I had been undeservedly betrayed. That I had received a bitter insult, worse than death. If the idea of suicide could ever lay hold on a Moslem, it would have laid hold on me that day.

The next day, after wandering through the Kasbah, still half stupefied, I entered Papaluet's café. He looked at me:

"Ho, son! What's the matter with you? Pain somewhere? Liver? Heart? No? I don't believe you. Then why do you look like a drowned kitten?"

Cirta stood up and put her paws on my shoulders . . . Cirta who had so often placed herself between me and Zina, of whom she was jealous.

It was too much! I hid in the cellar, and I wept, I wept, I wept, as if I had not been a man. Yes, there in that cellar I wept the last tears of my childhood . . .

After I had cried myself out, I went to sleep. When I woke, Papaluet was kneeling beside me. Sometimes a confession rises to your lips while you are asleep, involuntarily.

But what I had muttered had doubtless not been enough, for he went on questioning me until I had at last admitted the reason for my grief . . .

And when he had heard me, he straightened up and cried:

*"Dio Cane!* I don't know what keeps me from knocking you over the head till all the water in your body squirts out of your eyes! Damn if I didn't think you'd been kicked out of school, or killed someone! Frighten me like that—me! And for what, Holy Virgin!? Because your girl has left you! If it isn't a shame, with all you've been taught, you haven't

learned that if one woman leaves you today there'll be a dozen hanging on your neck tomorrow!"

But now I had lost her, I realized only too well that Zina was not the kind of woman who can be replaced.

Charles would have understood me better. But I could not tell him, for fear of marring his own happiness.

Would it be right to tell him never to trust a woman—just now, when I saw that he was seriously in love for the first time?

Charles always took everything seriously: work, friendship, love.

The best Frenchmen are like that. But the others are more noticeable.

The young lady was named Germaine. She was blonde, tall, and strong and she was worthy of a man's deep devotion. Her gaiety, her frankness, her pleasantness were as real as the gold of her hair. She worked in a bank . . . She was very badly paid . . . and dressed any old way . . . Which means that—though she was a stenographer and consequently surrounded by men who were always ready to transform their offices into harems—she had preserved her virginity.

Otherwise, young and pretty as she was, she could have had beautiful clothes and not have worked so hard, at least during the day.

She was generous, and she was to behave toward me like a true sister.

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I did not answer Aunt Zohra's letter.

Silence is a man's best and worst weapon against those who have offended him, misunderstood him.

I went back to work and worked furiously.

Pride is often wholesome. This was not the time, by any possible failure, to give Zina new reasons for having preferred another man to myself. And what a man! Rich and senile!

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On my little rose, a drone had lighted.

It was in March that I had learned of what I was long to call Zina's treachery.

At the beginning of April I received a letter announcing the death of my mother.

Although she had succumbed in a few moments, in my father's arms, the expression "sudden death" seems to me inappropriate. She had been dying ever since the death of our Ali.

We have a proverb which runs:

"If your father dies, your mother's lap will be your pillow. But if your mother dies, you will have nowhere to lay your head but the doorsill."

In June, nevertheless, I received my primary-school teacher's certificate.

But my success did not give me the satisfaction I should have felt under different circumstances.

In peacetime a trip to Paris had been the customary reward for a native who had passed his examinations successfully.

All the older Moslem teachers whom I questioned seemed to have very pleasant memories of their trips, based not so much on the beauty of the country they had traveled through, of the buildings they had visited, as on the courteous and amiable treatment they had received.

If I had been able to make that beautiful journey, it might perhaps have saved me from the misfortune of an unhappy marriage.

Such was not the will of God!

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I left Normal School with high marks and a laudatory citation. This should have allowed me to hope for a position either in or near to a large city—as in Charles's case.

) 157 (



But I was only a native, and such positions were in high demand among French teachers too.

It then occurred to me to remind M. Ferdinand of the promise of his patronage which he had given me on the day when I returned to him certain extremely important papers which had dropped from his coat pocket.

His office seemed to be the most propitious place for such an errand and I was almost certain that he would give me a courteous reception there.

The difficulty was to find a suitable formula of introduction.

M. Ferdinand had never known my real name. It was even doubtful whether he remembered the name under which I went at Baya's. In his recollection I was probably only: "That little Kabyle who plays the reed flute, likes poetry, and uncorks champagne without making a noise . . ."

These are hardly titles by which to have oneself announced in a government office.

I set out nevertheless, counting on luck, and I entered a vast antichamber at the precise moment when the door of an office opened and M. Ferdinand appeared on the threshold. He was seeing out a distinguished visitor with due ceremony.

He saw me, recognized me vaguely . . . left his sentence unfinished . . . knitted his brows like someone who is searching his memory, finished his sentence, bowed to his noble visitor, motioned me to come in, and shut the door behind us.

"Sit down, my friend. To what do I owe the honor of your visit?"

As well as I could, I told him who I was (that is, the rank I had recently acquired), what I wanted (that is, a position near Algiers, where I had friends), and how impossible I supposed it would be for me to get what I wanted, despite

my high marks, without his good offices, because there were so very many candidates.

I had spoken extremely seriously, yet he began to laugh and laugh until the gold chain across his stomach jumped. He seemed to think it so funny that I had been able to keep up my studies at the Normal School by day despite my nocturnal employments at Baya's house.

Then, having managed to calm himself a little, he said:

"Very well . . . I shall look into it. . . . Ha ha ha! If you haven't been lying, you can count on me, my boy . . . Ha ha! Just write me down your name, the name of your *duar*, and your degree . . . Ha ha! Don't worry, I'll look out for you. Ha ha! Well, there is always something new to learn about you Kabyles, however well we may think we know you . . . Ha ha ha ha!"

He was still shaking with laughter as he walked to the door with me to see me out. But he was perfectly serious when he opened the door onto the antichamber in which many visitors were still waiting.

The following day—still very doubtful of my fate—I took the bus for Kabylia. I could not but think that, during our brief interview, M. Ferdinand had laughed at my story too much for me to take his promise seriously.

Yet I had been wrong in mistrusting such a man. Less than a month after our interview, I received notice that, beginning with the October term, I would be appointed to teach in a new school which it had been decided to open in the Kasbah of Algiers.

## ♦ I 6 ♦

I WAS happy for twenty-four hours.

The twenty-fifth, my father said to me:

"And now you are in a position to maintain yourself and a family . . . You are twenty . . . You must marry as soon as possible."

I made a vague gesture which he must have taken for agreement. Had any of us ever had the temerity to cross my father's will? If my brother Ahmed had dared to do it, it was because he had been at a safe distance!

In any case, why should I have rebelled against such a sensible decision?

When a man goes out to work, and his mother is no longer with him, there must be some woman or other to look after his washing, his meals, and his other appetites.

Since Zina had married another, what did it matter to me whom I married! . . .

So, why argue? . . . I felt infinitely weary . . . It was as if the

immensity of our mountains had suddenly fallen on me and crushed me. It was probably a reaction to the strain of my last school year, during which I had frequently had to work long hours to make up for the time I so often lost in Baya's patio.

And finally, the demon who persecutes me had seen to it that, at this decisive moment of my life, my master was away.

He had left for France, and Lakdar, my half-brother, had heard that he would not be back before the end of the summer.

Meanwhile, here I was—all alone, and not knowing what to do. I could not return to farming. Everyone seemed to think that, because I was an educated man, it was no longer permissible for me to lower myself by doing such work.

I would gladly have set myself up as a public scribe, but the good folk of our *duar* were not often inclined to spend two sous for postage, to say nothing of buying the paper I should need for this wholesome distraction.

I did not even have the resource of reading. My head needed a complete rest.

And, not knowing what to do, I did not know to whom I should talk.

Now that I bore a title given me by the French, the men of the *duar* were not ready to trust me again until they had seen whether, when I received my diploma, I had not also been transformed into a renegade.

As for the women, no man could say the most innocent word to the younger ones without arousing the suspicions of their male relatives.

There was still Mariam. She avoided me, and I did not seek her out. The sight of her reminded me too vividly that I had lost Zina. And I had now learned what her share had been in Zina's marriage and how she had sold her daughter for a chance to enjoy city life once more.

In any case, she had been punished for it. For the death of my mother had obliged her to come back from Tunis and resume the role of wife to my father.

However consoling I found the thought that vengeance had overtaken her, it was not a sufficient occupation for all my days.

So, not being strong enough to bear grief, silence, and solitude simultaneously, I resumed my acquaintance with Abd-el-Kader, the companion of my youth.

It was the worst thing I could do.

Abd-el-Kader had been jealous of me ever since I had left the fields to go to school.

His jealousy had reached an acute stage when I received my certificate and was notified of my appointment.

I was as far as possible from suspecting the real nature of his feelings toward me. Because my feelings toward him were just as friendly as they had always been. And because I considered his lot too pleasant for him to have to envy anyone.

He owned fertile land, of which he was the sole master, having been clever and lucky enough to buy it at a low price from an old man who was no longer able to work it.

And, the previous year, he had married a beautiful, strong girl, who, nine months after the wedding day, had given him twin sons.

I could not help wishing for such a progeny for myself, as my father seemed more and more determined that I should marry before the end of my vacation.

One day, I was imprudent enough to express my wish aloud. Immediately Abd-el-Kader exclaimed:

"Your father wants you to marry? . . . Why didn't you tell me so! . . . My wife has a younger sister who would suit you perfectly."

I was fool enough to tell him that my father had already

begun negotiations with the parents of another girl in the *duar* and that, if I could believe Lakdar, the bargain was almost concluded.

At which Abd-el-Kader shrugged his shoulders:

"As long as she is not in your bed, you can always hope for another!"

Soon afterward I learned that my father had suddenly found himself faced by excessive demands. The girl's parents, who at first had seemed satisfied with the honor of entering our family, were now asking, in exchange for their virgin, several ewes and a good ram, not to mention the usual jars of oil and sacks of grain.

The reason was that Abd-el-Kader had meanwhile urged these simple-minded people to increase their demands, insisting that I was so vain that I would despise my wife unless she had cost a very high price.

My father was proud and hated chaffering, especially in such cases. So he broke off negotiations with the girl's poor parents, who had the misfortune to succumb to Abd-el-Kader's wiles.

It was a pity, because the girl who had been intended for me, if she was no great beauty, had the reputation of being gentle, pleasant, and industrious, all of which would have been perfectly suitable for the household of a modest school-teacher.

When he had thus caused the failure of the first negotiations, Abd-el-Kader did not rest until he had brought my father to the point of negotiating with the family of the wrong woman.

The older women who had had the privilege of seeing her insisted that she was unusually beautiful. None of them said anything about virtue, decency, or health. A mother would have been suspicious of such silence on the subject of quali-

ties which are much more indispensable for a good marriage than perfect features or a graceful body.

My father, wise as he was, suspected nothing . . .

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When an agreement had been reached concerning the amount of the dowry to be paid to the parents of my future wife, I returned to Algiers to find suitable living quarters as close as possible to the school in which I should be teaching.

But the war was daily overcrowding cities, and even the Kasbah had been invaded.

So Papaluet, to whom I had gone for advice as soon as I arrived, exclaimed:

"My poor boy! You'll be lucky if you can keep afloat all by yourself in this sewer! Bah!"

And he at once dispatched several smart young fellows in various directions, saying to each:

"I'll stand you to free drinks for a week if you find a decent place to live for this fellow. He is like my son."

In this way I soon learned that there was something available in a respectable house in the Rue Sophonisbe.

The owner, a woman, occupied a large part of the house, with five or six sons, an equal number of daughters-in-law, and a quantity of grandchildren.

Her name was Urida Jaglu. But if you wanted a good reception, it was better to address her as Lalla (which means Madam), for though her means were small, she kept up a great deal of style.

I went to see her the same evening.

She received me in a manner at once ceremonious and familiar. At first she left it to me to approach her with plentiful *salam-aleiks* and sacramental formulas. Then she proceeded to give me the sort of intimate details about her family and

herself which are usually supposed to be furnished by the tenant rather than the landlord.

Meanwhile she showed me through two quite small and rather dark rooms and a cubbyhole which served as a kitchen and received light from an open patio. But there was running water at the top of the stairs, and electricity throughout.

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The following morning Papaluet and I went to the Place de Chartres.

To this day the Place de Chartres is still the site of a permanent covered market.

On one side there are fruits and flowers and the finest and freshest vegetables in the world. On the other, secondhand furniture, clothing, and books.

After Papaluet had argued for a long time with several secondhand dealers, I acquired a set of furniture in mahogany, consisting of a large bed, a desk, a round table, a commode, two sections of bookcase, easy chairs, and several other chairs . . . It all came from the auction of the property of a Frenchman who had died without leaving children.

Certainly, I did not need all that furniture, either for happiness or unhappiness.

But Papaluet would not agree:

"Ho! Wait a minute! . . . Are you a schoolteacher or not? . . . And you want to camp like a tramp? Well, since I'm footing the bill, you can damn well leave it to me!"

He absolutely insisted on adding a wardrobe to the lot—a wardrobe with double doors and twin mirrors.

Then, with the help of twenty porters picked up in the market, we set out for the Rue Sophonisbe.

It was a real parade, and the folk of the Kasbah looked on curiously.

Papaluet had an armchair on his head and one of the ward-



robe mirrors under each arm. He swore ceaselessly, for his repertory was enormous and, under such a load, it was difficult to turn the corners without running into things.

As for me—in one hand I carried a bronze-and-crystal chandelier which was remarkably heavy, and in the other a piano-stool which the dealer had thrown into the bargain.

When the furniture was in place and Lalla Urida had kindly agreed to polish everything up with the assistance of a Fatima, I set out—this time alone—for the Rue de la Lyre.

This is the domain of Mozabite and Jewish merchants; here they had set up various kinds of bazaars in which you can buy every article of feminine finery.

For my wife-to-be, I bought silks, a pink velvet jacket embroidered in gold, several scarfs and waists, spangled laces, *babushs* decorated with mother-of-pearl, and even a few pieces of gold jewelry.

In a single afternoon, and for a girl whom I did not know, I spent the treasure which I had so long been storing up in my amulet, sometimes hoping that it would enable me to buy Baya, sometimes to purchase a trousseau for Zina, both of whom I had so ardently desired for different reasons.

I had possessed one of them passingly. The other I should never possess.

The thought was not without bitterness.

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The following morning I went to take the bus, escorted by Papaluet, who volubly expressed his regret at being unable to accompany me farther:

"There, there! It's not that I don't want to! But I've no one to leave in charge except Cirta—and God hasn't taught Cirta how to talk yet!"

A friend had seen me off, a friend was waiting to greet me on my arrival.

) 166 (

When I got out of the bus, there was my master.

Had he come back especially for my wedding?

He shook his head:

"How could I know that you were going to be married? When I went away, I did not even leave an address . . . But I was too unhappy in France . . . It rained all the time . . ."

Then I was married—with no pomp, and with only a very few people present; for certain unpleasant incidents had recently occurred in Kabylia, and for the time being all gatherings were forbidden, even at weddings.

For my part, I was not too displeased that circumstances should spare me the fatigue and strain which three days of wedding festivities bring in their train, especially when one is the bridegroom and when, from living among Christians, one has acquired somewhat different ideas of pleasure than those of one's childhood.

But my young wife would never again have such an opportunity to arouse the admiration and jealousy of her companions.

Although the thing was in no way my fault, she always held me responsible for the loss she had thus suffered.

For she was neither gentle, nor forgiving, nor very intelligent.

But I had better introduce her at once, by a full-length portrait.

## ♦ I 7 ♦

SHE was fifteen . . . Her name was Yamina. She was usually called Mina.

Her hair was very black, very long, and very smooth—it slipped through your fingers. Her skin was golden, her eyes dark-blue.

Her teeth were like grains of *kuskus*, her lips a little thick but very red. Her nose was passable.

She had round cheeks, and when she lowered her lids her lashes cast a shadow. The ends of her shining eyebrows turned up toward the temples. They were like wings.

She was not very tall. She was inclined to plumpness, though she looked slight. You never felt her bones. When you touched her she melted like sand.

She appeared to be a virgin when I married her. But she was so shameless from the very first that, later when I desired her less and knew her better, I asked myself whether she could have been so. In our country, the older women are

skilled at restoring an appearance of newness to what is no longer new!

When, contrary to our custom, I showed Yamina to Papa-luet unveiled—it was in the cellar of his café—he gave the admiring whistle with which he acknowledged a perfect success. Then he said:

“Poh poh poh! With a wife like that, you’re not going to feel like working hard every day! Well, a bureaucrat doesn’t have much to do! *Dio Cane!* She’s too beautiful! Not likely she’ll be too good! Well—take it while you have it, and we’ll see how things turn out.”

I took it for a joke, but I was soon to see that he had hit the mark at first glance.

Greedy, lazy, dirty, smart as a monkey, with an immoderate appetite for pleasure and expense, Yamina took a real delight in degrading and destroying everything she touched. In less time than it takes to tell it, she would make a rag out of a piece of brocade. And soon the room which was meant to be our bedroom was so filled with clothes, soiled linen, dirty pots, and cracked plates, and so littered with fruit pits and peelings that it was impossible to set foot in it except immediately in front of the wardrobe, where Mina spent her days admiring herself in the twin mirrors.

I had an appetite for her. I blamed her faults on her youth and a bad upbringing. And, though I took up my quarters in the other room—which I locked every time I went out and carried the key with me—I tried to make Yamina understand that she must learn not to be so disorderly and even to straighten things up once in a while.

She did not say no, but she did not do it, and each time found some fantastic excuse for her carelessness.

For she was a past master in the art of deceit, and her passion for lying reached such a point that, when she found herself forced to tell the truth, she turned purple and almost

stuttered. That was when you would have said she was lying!

Never was her face more in repose, never were her eyes clearer, than when, telling me some absurd tale, she would end by saying: "If I am lying, kill me!"

As to her obstinacy, the obstinacy of a mule caught between cliff and precipice and refusing to move either forward or back was as nothing compared to Yamina's.

When I married her I knew that she was ignorant, just as most of the girls from the Kabyle *bled* are, but I had flattered myself that she would not long remain so in my company. And, soon after we moved to the city, I tried patiently to teach her.

But she put such an amount of perseverance into refusing to listen to me—to say nothing of showing any sign of understanding me—that I soon lost my temper.

And when I got angry, she had the hardihood to stand up to me.

She would never learn! . . . She had no desire to be the laughing-stock of her neighbors! Her father had given her to me to breed children, not to go to school!

She hissed with fury like a little viper, and rage did not make her ugly.

So I demonstrated to her what I could do in my capacity as lord of her body, and gave up trying to teach her to read, at least for the time being. Later on, I was too busy—and had grown too indifferent—ever to renew the attempt.

I had also planned to treat her as an equal, to have her sit at table with me.

She did not seem inclined to understand the honor I meant to do her, and she soon realized the disadvantages of a favor which would have forced her to eat bad food in my company when, by herself, she could feast on things which she liked much better.

Each time that she refused to share my repast—looking

embarrassed and pretending to respect the traditions—it was because she had been stuffing herself with pastries.

As for me, did I need to eat so heartily? And here too she took refuge behind tradition.

In Kabylia, except on high holidays, men content themselves with a piece of bread dipped in oil, dried figs, and sour milk.

In the city, I had acquired less frugal habits. I asked her to bear it in mind. Thereafter at mealtimes, she sent a boy with a covered pot to buy anything at all from any near-by food shop. And when I reproached her with thus avoiding her duties as a housekeeper, she opened her beautiful eyes wide and said:

“O Mourad! How changeable you are! Why do you want me to do today what you did not want to see me do yesterday?”

When we had arrived in Algiers, I had tried to make up by new pleasures for those which Yamina had missed because of our quiet wedding. I had taken her to one restaurant after another (always veiled, of course).

Papaluet had often invited us to dinner too.

Yamina had thought that this amusing and expensive life would be our regular mode of existence.

After submitting for some time to a regime so contrary to what I had expected from married life and so deleterious to my work and my health, I saw that it would be impossible to transform my courtesan into a housekeeper in the immediate future. I therefore arranged matters so that I could live outside our home as much as possible.

Whereupon—reproaches and screams. For Yamina could even be violent . . .

The state of dependence and fear in which women are kept in Islam makes the majority of them gentle, patient, and submissive. From time to time, however, the malice of

the Devil seems to lay it upon some one woman to avenge all her sisters.

I had chanced upon one of these favorites of the Devil. And her behavior toward Charles's wife shows just what she was capable of.

Shortly before I had married Yamina, Charles had married Germaine. The latter, although she was now carrying her first child, was kind enough to go out of her way to make the acquaintance of my wife.

Charles had written to me to indicate the day of their arrival and had told me how much they were both looking forward to the reunion.

But Yamina, when I told her of their approaching visit, said:

"I shall spit in your Christian woman's face!"

(She sometimes pretended to be jealous, when it served her momentary ends.)

I did not force the matter. I felt sure that, after another night during which I should prove to her what an appetite I had for her body, she would not persist in her stupid attitude.

But when my friends signaled their arrival by joyous cries, Mina hid herself in a corner of her room. Nothing would tempt her out, and when I took her arm to compel her, she began to scream frightfully.

Yet I could not beat her before such people!

Then Germaine said quietly:

"Just leave her alone, Mourad. Don't insist."

As if I were the obstinate one!

Charles had turned very pale.

Cirta saved the situation by attracting Germaine into the patio. She tugged at the hem of her dress, as if saying:

"Come—I have something better to show you out here."

Meanwhile, I closeted myself in my study with Charles.

A little later we heard bursts of laughter.

The women of the house had not been able to restrain themselves from first crowding around Germaine, then touching her, and finally unbuttoning her dress part way.

This almost always happens when a Christian woman finds herself in a Moslem house, for our women are intensely curious to know if *rumias* are built like themselves.

Instead of struggling, defending herself, or calling for help, as certain ladies did, Germaine consented to let them undress her. It was hot, after all there were only women present, and she was pretty enough not to be afraid of exhibiting herself.

The texture of her fair skin had drawn cries of admiration from her audience. Then there had been a discussion concerning the relative merits of depilation and non-depilation.

It happened that one of the young women of the house was pregnant too. The most free-spoken of the other seized the opportunity to say to Germaine:

"Ts, ts, ts, my beauty. It's terrible. Yours is going to pick up a beard on the way out!"

To which she answered:

"If mine has a beard, hers will certainly be bald!"

Whence the bursts of laughter we had heard.

Then Germaine put on her clothes, and her new friends, to show their gratitude, showered her with attentions: some bringing her honey cakes, others making coffee for her.

Cirta ran from one to another yapping with delight, for each had a piece of sugar to throw her.

All this time, my wife remained obstinately hidden in her room, like an animal in the brush.

That evening, to emphasize my displeasure, I slept alone on the little couch in my study, and all the next day and the next I spoke not a word to her. But on the third night I succumbed to her seductiveness again.



Some time later, I paid a return visit to Charles and Germaine—but alone. After that, I went to see them from time to time, but not very often.

It was unavoidable that my wife's hostility should trouble my pleasant relations with them.

Although we never spoke of her when we were together, we could none of us help thinking of Yamina. I, because I was ashamed of her behavior; they, because they felt sorry that I had made such a bad match.

Naturally, we managed to find other excuses to explain the rarity of our reunions.

Charles was working very hard to prepare for a new set of examinations. And I had plenty to do merely trying to practice my profession under very difficult conditions.

## ♦ I 8 ♦

MY school was located half way down one of the longest streets in the Kasbah. It bore the illustrious name of the N'Fissa, Turkish noblemen who had ruled Algiers before 1830. To enter the school premises, you had to pass a little enclosure in which three daughters of that powerful dynasty were buried.

The place was therefore known as the "Cemetery of the Princesses," and over the inconspicuous little wooden door which shut it off from the street the French had recently placed a white marble tablet on which, in letters of gold, its history was made known to foreigners.

At the time of which I write, Cook's had taken up the Cemetery of the Princesses and were coining money from it by letting more or less ignorant tourists—whether more or less so, they were always in a hurry—overrun it each time a ship put in.

My pupils and I were often to be disturbed by their noisy footsteps, their loud voices. However, I did not always have

to show myself in order to force them to be silent. The majesty of the place itself sufficed.

During the greater part of the year the enclosure was bathed in the shadow of two enormous fig trees which had taken root between the little white marble slabs under which rested the three princesses, together with some of their nurses, duennas, and female relatives.

In winter, on sunny days, the skeletons of the fig trees cast shadows on the tombs, forming indecipherable arabesques.

By moonlight, at any season, the beauty of the place was unforgettable.

Unfortunately, there was a great contrast between the peace of this garden and the atmosphere of my own domain.

This new school—of which I was director, sole teacher, and sometimes janitor—had been opened much later than the date originally set.

For when the idea of creating it had been approved, it was necessary to obtain a favorable vote from the Financial Delegations (Algerian Parliament). And when the appropriation was voted, the money was not immediately available.

So, to get the children in off the streets, the partitions of an old building had been knocked down, the walls had been repainted, and the room thus botched together had been decorated with a blackboard, a small platform, and a bust of the French Republic.

It was not until a year later that I was given tables. So in the early days my pupils had to squat on mats, which I had myself supplied, and to use their benches for desks.

Afternoons, particularly in summer, they preferred to lay their heads on them and go to sleep.

And sometimes I preferred to pretend that I did not notice their drowsiness. It was such a terrible job to control them when they were wide awake.

The single room should have held sixty children at most. I often counted eighty.

My pupils were from six to fifteen years of age. So some had to be taught the alphabet while others were being prepared for graduation. It was not always the youngest who were the farthest behind.

They belonged to most of the world's known races. White, yellow, a solitary black. The only thing I didn't have was a redskin. The principal element was a mixture of more or less hybrid Latins, such as is found in every Mediterranean port. Sons of traders, of keepers of suspect houses, and of other more or less legitimate varieties of thieves.

Yet there are some others who were worth looking after and separating from the riff-raff.

I did my best, but it is always hard to keep the worse from contaminating the better. If I had not learned to tend cattle before teaching boys, I could not have managed it.

And without Cirta it would have been impossible.

As long as I could remain facing them, my bad pupils kept more or less quiet. But I had to turn my back occasionally, if only to write problems or sentences on the blackboard. Instantly there was shoving and fighting.

Shepherds know that the vicious animals in a flock must be herded apart. So I put my bandits in a carefully segregated section of my classroom and left it to Cirta to watch them.

She had lost none of her faculties by living in the city. And even my worst pupils were sufficiently afraid of her to remain more or less quiet while I worked with their more tractable schoolfellows.

Toward the close of certain particularly difficult days, I would sometimes find myself succumbing to a sort of mirage . . .

Those forms drooping on benches. . . .

That monotonous murmur of voices mumbling a passage . . .

Those heads and bodies swaying in time with the rhythm of thought . . .

And, from outside, the voice of a siren, bringing thoughts of the eternal sea . . .

I was on a galley. But it was I who was to carry my galley-slaves to less stagnant shores, to clearer horizons . . .

I wasn't a teacher, I was a galley-sergeant!

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Emerging from such an atmosphere, I would gladly have lingered in the Cemetery of the Princesses. But I could not.

The prices of the least things were rising from day to day and were soon to rise even more, without any present increase in my salary.

The fact that Yamina was greedy, lazy, and utterly incapable of managing the house saddled me with many extra expenses.

From frequenting Christians, I too had acquired bad habits. I had to have meat every day, just as if every day were a holiday . . . I liked to be well dressed . . . My neckties cost me at least five francs . . .

I earned a hundred and twenty francs a month. I spent twice as much. So, to augment my resources, I undertook to do certain kinds of work out of school hours.

Papaluet had found me several clients who, like myself, needed a discreet and honest person to write their letters and keep their accounts.

If I had listened to my old friend, I would have given up my position immediately. He would sometimes look at me pityingly and say:

"Christo! Lucky for me that my father didn't make me stay in school! If he had—why now, instead of making a for-

tune as I've been doing, I might even be earning as little as you do . . . Come on boy! Drop it—it'll never make you fat! Let's go into partnership together . . ."

And I would answer:

"Wait a little . . . We'll see . . . Yes . . . Later . . . Perhaps . . ."

How could he, who put material gains before everything, comprehend that my ill-paid profession gave me certain other satisfactions which compensated for a great many disappointments.

The best of my pupils were becoming my friends. Some of them loved me. A few admired me. They all had the utmost need of me. They were almost my children, while I waited for the child which Yamina had conceived—at last!

## ♦ I 9 ♦

ON November 11, 1918, I was at Papaluet's when the bells began to ring, the sirens to shriek, and *Sambre-et-Meuse*, the *Marseillaise*, and *Tipperary* to scream from all the phonographs in the neighborhood.

On the terraces of the Kasbah, women began howling. Others took up the cry and strengthened it until it seemed to rise to heaven.

I thought of the vibrant *yu-yu* which, four years earlier had been raised in Kabylia at my brother Ali's departure, and I bowed my head.

Papaluet set up a round of free drinks for his customers. I shook my head in refusal and left without even saying good-by . . . There was such a tightness in my throat that I could not utter a word.

I had only one wish—to get home and shut myself up there. But already the streets of the Kasbah were filled with a vast crowd which seemed to have sprung out of the ground and

which carried everything with it, like the water in a *wed* after a few minutes' downpour.

It was impossible to make headway against such a current. I had to follow the stream to the foot of the old town, thinking that there I should be able to free myself. But the Place du Gouvernement was already covered by another multitude, which overflowed as far as the balustrade along the boulevard which overlooks the sea, and we were instantly swallowed by this second crowd, which contained a great many whores and pickpockets.

The newspaper kiosks had been thrown over, after having been emptied of the cigarettes and tobacco which they sold too. And Sadoun, the old florist whose wooden stall leans against the wall of the Pêcherie, stood among his trampled chrysanthemums, cursing the crowd in all the languages he knew.

A few streetcars which insisted on trying to make their way to the other European quarters were taken by assault and loaded—even to the roofs—with people whose appearance was no recommendation.

Anyone watching the behavior of that crowd at the moment of victory might well ask himself what it would have done in defeat.

Not until evening did I make my way up to the Kasbah, as well as I could. I was bruised and limping, and my pockets were empty, for a clever pickpocket had fleeced me in the crowd.

My house was quiet . . . my apartment deserted . . . There was a sound of women's laughter from the terrace. Yamina was probably there. She was not the kind of wife who makes your burden lighter, who comforts you in unhappiness . . . She had not even known my brother, and she was not good enough or intelligent enough to listen in silence while I talked of him . . .



Yet I could not remain miserably alone on this evening of triumph and bitterness . . .

For the last two days, Cirta had been at the house of one of Papaluet's customers, a man who owned a highly bred dog. Despite my tiredness, I went for her.

When I reached the man's house, he said:

"You've come for her, have you? Good! Ever since this morning, I don't know what's got into her . . . She wanders around, she whimpers . . . She howls! It's a sound that certainly gets on your nerves."

Cirta raised her beautiful golden eyes to me . . . She had sensed my sorrow at a distance, and now she seemed to be saying: "Excuse me! I was mad about that dog for a while . . . But I return to you—man—to give you whatever help you need, so far as I am able."

I returned home with Cirta. I entered the room which served as my study and sat down on the little divan where I had often slept since Yamina became pregnant.

Cirta laid her muzzle on my thigh. From my pocket I took the only photograph of Ali I possessed (a small snapshot, taken on the dock the day he had left for the front). I showed it to Cirta and said:

"Do you remember how handsome and strong and brave and modest he was?"

Cirta raised her head and whined . . .

Later I found my other relics. They were three postcards, covered with rather clumsy handwriting, for Ali had not learned to write until he had been made a sergeant.

I promised myself that I would read them often. I also decided, although it was contrary to the customs of Islam, to have the snapshot enlarged and to hang it where I could see it every night when I went to bed and every morning when I woke.

Still later, Lalla Urida came to ask my permission to take

Mina out—she and some of the women of the household were going to visit a female relative whose house was not far away and from whose terrace there was a view of the French town, which was brilliantly illuminated that evening.

I gladly granted my permission, since it would give me a longer period of silence and tranquillity to devote to my thoughts of my brother . . .

The women returned late and chattered for a long time in the patio. They seemed happy.

When Yamina half-opened the door of my room, I pretended to be asleep, if only to save myself the trouble of calling out:

“Go away!”

All the rest of that night, Cirta stayed awake too. She remained at my side. From time to time she laid her cold muzzle on my hot hand.

Two days later—that is, as quickly as it could arrive from Tunis—I received another letter from Zina, who seemed to have shared my feelings on the day of the Armistice.

If I say “another” letter, it is because Zina had begun to write to me again soon after my marriage, on the pretext of congratulating me upon that happy event!

I had left several of her letters unanswered, and then had sent her a few lines, making them as formal as possible.

But little by little we had resumed the familiar tone of our youthful correspondence, only omitting the expressions of tenderness which had always closed our letters.

In letter after letter, Zina gave me a minute description of the life she was leading in Tunis. On my side, I told her about my life here, only painting it in brighter colors.

She wrote:

“I live in a big house set in the middle of such a huge garden that I am afraid to go walking in it alone.

"Even my own room is immense. You could give a banquet in it.

"All one side of it is nothing but a row of windows, barred against robbers and screened against mosquitoes, which are plentiful here.

"Under the windows is an orange grove, and despite the bars, the scent of orange flowers or fruits fills my room, according to the season.

"Yet I miss the scent of our mountains.

"Everything here is too luxurious, and I have nothing to do but yawn . . . My room is full of useless things . . . But the floor is paved with marvelous tiles, decorated with innumerable figures . . . So, when I am alone, I lift the corner of the carpet and go down on all fours to look more closely . . . I have even given them names. There is one which looks like you . . ."

In another letter she said:

"I have been ill . . . And I think it is with boredom. To distract me, I have been allowed to study music. There is a piano in one corner of my room now.

"My teacher is a young Frenchwoman.

"I have another teacher too. She is older and less nice. She teaches me other things. Sometimes I go for a drive. Every time I find something beautiful, I give it to you in my heart."

A month passed before she wrote to me again. Then she told me:

"Now we have a third grandson. It was a very difficult birth, and we were very much afraid for his mother. That is why I have not written . . . She would have no one but me with her.

"I have taken the baby into my room. It will console me for never being able to hope for one of my own."

For women who want to please you always tell you that

their husbands are impotent, or give you to understand as much.

Each of Zina's letters brought me both pleasure and pain. Each of them set me thinking of what my life would have been if Zina had occupied the place beside me which Yamina filled so badly.

But a man does not repudiate the woman who is about to give him a child. And I hoped that maternity would bring my wife to her senses, would discipline her sloth and moderate her capriciousness.

Among our women, the maternal instinct is so well developed that sometimes they will do for a son what they have not done for his father.

For it would be a son, of course . . . Perhaps two . . . If only Yamina would follow the tradition of her family, like her sister, Abd-el-Kader's wife.

But in December, 1918, Yamina brought a mere girl into the world.

She herself seemed so disconcerted that I did not let her see my own disappointment. I gave her a jewel, and took some consolation in naming our little daughter Zina.

But though she had a strong constitution, she whom in my heart I called "Zina the Second" was not to live long.

The Kasbah has always been fertile ground for epidemics, and what was known as "Spanish influenza" was soon to ravage it.

My school had to close for a month. And in our house everyone except Lalla Urida was more or less seriously ill. I was the first to recover, but my little daughter died. And, but for my care, it is not certain that Yamina would have survived.

However, she claimed that I had had nothing to do with it, and that she had been saved only by the kindness of a neighbor who had brought her a charm from the public

scribe at the foot of the street—who, upon occasion, transformed himself into a wizard too.

This learned man, mixing his ink with powdered gold, had drawn a magic formula against disease on a square of white paper. And Yamina, to make the charm more efficacious, had rolled it into a pill and swallowed it.

We all have our superstitions. But this one was really too crude!

But I was still attached to my wife in certain ways, and so I was delighted by her recovery.

Soon afterward she became pregnant again, for the second time, and she gave birth to our second daughter ten months after the death of the first.

This time I was so disappointed that I did not even give her a scarf, and I left her the duty of choosing the child's name.

She was named Muna and she died at the age of a year and eight months through the fault of her mother, who had left her on the terrace, half naked and sweating, when a wind was rising from the sea.

Lalla Urida minced no words in telling Yamina what she thought of her conduct; then she did her best to help me nurse my child. She looked after it by day, while I was teaching school. And I spent my nights at its bedside. Meanwhile, Muna's mother slept soundly in the next room. But it was better that she should sleep. When she woke, all she could do was to howl "Ba, ba, ba!" as if she were in deep despair. It saved her the trouble of doing anything which, though it might be useful to the rest of us, would certainly be tiring for herself.

Thus for twelve nights I struggled with death for the child which I had greeted so disdainfully on the day of its birth and which I would now have given anything to save.

From her sixth month, she had begun to smile at me in a way that touched my heart.

She almost never cried—at least when I was there. As soon as she saw me, her big black eyes shone and she began to chatter like the twittering of birds.

Her smile was enchanting . . . When she died, there were already fifteen little pearls in her baby mouth.

She walked with her head very straight, her shoulders well under control, with a dignity surprising in such a young child . . . It was thus that my mother Khadija had walked, and Muna looked very much like her.

She was already my little companion . . .

At the last Ramadan celebrations—for which solemn occasion I had bought her a beautiful turquoise dress—I had carried her, perched on my shoulders, all through the old town.

I walked carefully so that she should not lose her balance; and she patted my cheeks, or held onto one of my ears, or pulled my hair. Whereupon, with a sort of furious snort, I turned my head and said:

“I am your camel!”

I can still hear her laughter.

Cirta adored her, and I had much more confidence in Cirta than I had in Yamina as a guard for my little girl—to keep her from falling off the terrace or going too near the fire. But my dog’s genius did not extend to knowing how a little child can contract pneumonia.

Muna died on the thirteenth day of her illness, in the morning. And it was Cirta too who came to fetch me from school, when it was time.

Thus I was able to smile at my child to the last, and to save her from the most horrible of fears by putting her wicked mother out of the room—for, even before Muna was

dead, Yamina had begun tearing her cheeks to prove her despair to the world.

The following day, assisted by several friends among whom the chief were Papaluet and Charles, I accompanied my little Muna to her last resting place.

Some of my best pupils had also wished to offer me their assistance. For it is not our custom to have recourse to hirelings to carry our dead to the grave. But this body was so light that so many bearers would not have been necessary, nor would there have been any need of relays, had not they all wished thus, one after the other, to mark their respect for me, and their desire to lighten a calamity which weighed heavily upon me, and which still burdens me when I think of it.

Muna was buried in precious cloth of gold and silver, for unyielding coffins are not in use among us.

And she lies in the Moslem cemetery of El Kettar, which is close to the Kasbah, on the summit of a slope which faces the harbor and looks out over the open ocean.

It is planted with many trees, too, in which the birds sing, and it is bathed in light. It is an ideal spot, both for the living and the dead. I often go there.

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And then the days passed, and then the months. Papaluet, with whom I took refuge more often than ever—for I found the emptiness of my dwelling painful and the sight of Mina unbearable—scolded me kind-heartedly:

"See here—haven't you gone around long enough with that gloomy face? Cheer up! You are young and so is your wife . . . You'll have plenty more babies!"

But I shook my head . . . Yamina belonged to the fatal race which destroys everything, even its own offspring. Bet-

ter that henceforth she should have no opportunity to make yet more innocent victims.

While waiting to find a cause for repudiating her, I resolved never to approach her intimately again.

Soon after Muna's death, I had received a brief letter from Zina. She too was surrounded by sufferers and sickness.

Her youngest daughter-in-law was making a poor recovery from the grippe. Her old husband appeared to be failing rapidly . . . The best doctors in Tunis did not dare to say anything definite.

If her husband were out of the way, perhaps Zina would come back to me . . .

But I knew what happens to a man's plans when God does not approve them . . .

So I tried not to let my mind dwell on that thought too much.



I WAS twenty-one . . . I was not a saint . . . Yamina was a devil, and the atmosphere of the Kasbah is sufficiently infernal. Furthermore, it has always been easier for me to get along without food than without women . . . and my modest income did not permit me to go to a house of prostitution every day. Kief has the reputation of making men chaste. It also banishes your sorrows. Little by little, I began to use it.

It is an inexpensive drug, and hardly more harmful than alcohol. But the French Government, which protected the sale of the latter, prohibited the use of the former.

Consequently, most of the baths and Moorish cafés in Algiers were metamorphosed into clandestine smoking-dens at night.

One of these was in the establishment of Abdullah ben Larbi, a former sergeant in the Tirailleurs who had a small pension and a kahwaji's license (license to operate a café).

The back room was long and narrow. It could hold twenty

at most. On evenings when there were too many smokers, they had to accommodate themselves in the café proper, stretching out on the benches and tables which, by day, were the domain of chess players and sippers of mint tea.

When all the space was taken, the doors and windows were carefully closed. But it was impossible to prevent the characteristic odor of kief from creeping through the cracks to tell passersby that a large gathering of *hashashins* was in session at Abdullah ben Larbi's.

Yet the policemen who constantly patrol the Kasbah at night seemed to have lost their celebrated sense of smell when they strolled through our immediate neighborhood.

Abdullah tipped them once a month and made us pay a little more for our kief and hashish. But freedom from disturbance is worth paying for—especially when you are a government employee and certain misdemeanors can lose you your job.

Furthermore, Abdullah put himself out for his regular customers. The part of the back room which was reserved for them was furnished with strips of carpet in fairly good condition and with clean mats, and its mural decorations seemed to be the incarnation of a smoker's dreams. There was a locomotive with arched back and smoking nostrils, a lion hunt, and a slave market surmounted by an aeroplane at full speed.

A full-face of Charlie Chaplin and a profile of a yellow-haired woman (probably also a Hollywood figure) showed that mass-production pictures had invaded even the dream of the East.

I shall say nothing of the fantasmagorias which kief produced in me nor of the joys it brought me. For they have already inspired certain of my poems.

As for the real beings by whom I was surrounded at Abdullah's, after going there regularly for some time I picked

out four with whom I was soon exchanging something more than the customary greetings at arrival and departure.

Only one was a Moslem like myself. He was a Negro named Samba who had lost both legs in the Great War. He had been converted to Islamism while he was in hospital.

He would arrive rolling along in a little rubber-tired cart equipped with a Klaxon worthy of a Packard and ornamented with a hideous Negro fetish.

He was excessively clean, and on his horizon-blue tunic, faded by many washings and much sun, he wore the Croix de Guerre with four palms and two stars, and the Médaille Militaire.

Despite the loss of his legs, Samba had the gaiety of a child. Nor was he lacking in malice. It was something to hear him relate—with appropriate gestures—how, one after the other, the Catholic priest, the Protestant pastor, and the imam had tried to convert him.

If he had finally chosen Islamism, it was because the imam had promised him a *kuskus*—a dish of which he was extremely fond—and had sworn that he should have many more when he had entered the Mohammedan Paradise.

Another subject about which Samba often talked was Senegal, and the freedom and nakedness in which he had lived until the day he was sworn into the French army.

To hear him, you would think that the loss of his two legs had been less painful to him than his first experience of wearing trousers and shoes—especially shoes.

I could well understand it . . .

Dimitri had been an officer in the service of the Czar. Now he made biscuits in a room in the Rue du Diable and had them hawked in the French town by one of his former serfs, whose name was Ivan and who had remained in his service.

Bébert had belonged to the Foreign Legion and had taken part in a number of *baruds* (hand-to-hand battles) here and

there. But I believe he had deserted. He spoke of the "blues" as a demon which could make you suddenly forget all your duties.

He was born in an old quarter of Paris. His accent was of the commonest. When he sang, it became less noticeable, and he had a pleasant tenor voice.

"Grandfather" was an Alsatian by birth. He had been a clerk in a law office until his right arm had become paralyzed. Since then he had made a living by keeping an eye on rich people's cars at night in the French town, while their owners went to a restaurant or the theater or the movies.

Afterwards he came to smoke. Smoking was his only consolation in his wretched life, and Abdullah's his only home.

"Grandfather" was a quiet and well-mannered man. The atmosphere of the smoking den suited him. And I may say that there was never any sort of trouble there until the arrival of the Killer.

Said made his appearance one evening when the "*baffagne*" was raging. The *baffagne* is a violent hurricane which springs up in a few seconds, without any previous warning. It is the sudden fury of any angry God who, with a passionate gesture, sets the land wind against the sea wind, breaks trees, snaps ship's cables, and snatches men stupefied by drugs from their miraculous peace.

When I woke that night, the sirens of the ships in the harbor were screaming for a pilot. On the terraces of the Kasbah you heard all manner of things falling and bumping together—to judge by the sound they made when they hit the ground or struck against each other.

And Malvina, the Frenchwoman whose "shop" was next to Abdullah's café, was cursing the foul storm which had decapitated her geraniums.

Her shrill voice tortured our ear-drums during the rare moments when the *baffagne* subsided a little.

Bébert, who had no patience with women, rose, saying that he would make her "shut her trap and damn quick!"

When Bébert once set out to do something, he seldom stopped half way, even if death were waiting at the end of it. But this time he did stop before accomplishing his purpose, for Said had just opened the door and stood filling it in an unexpected and most striking fashion.

Said, if he is still alive, must still be a good head taller than I am, and I am not short. As for his breadth—it was so much larger than the norm upon which architects and masons base their calculations in constructing buildings and doors, that he was obliged to turn sidewise to pass through most doorways designed for mortals of average dimensions.

This gigantic bulk explains why Bébert—who had the reputation of letting nothing turn him back—paused in his rush and stopped before Said as if he had been the genius of the *baffagne* incarnate.

He quickly regained his self-control, however. And, to hide the fear which he had almost felt, he suddenly fell back a step and cried, clowning admirably:

"There! Don't be afraid! You may come in . . . little man!"

But Said had no sense of humor. He contented himself with shaking his bronzed snout and saying:

"Good evening . . . Thank you . . . I am Said the Killer, from the slaughterhouse."

Then he stretched himself on the mat beside mine, which happened to be unoccupied.

Outside, the *baffagne* had subsided. Such storms often stop as quickly as they begin. Not even Malvina broke the silence.

Yet I could not get back to sleep. The storm had put my nerves on edge. I started to smoke another pipe. Said the Killer was already asleep . . . And so utterly, so calmly, so

deeply asleep, that I bent over him several times to listen to his breathing and assure myself that he was really still alive.

For we had already had two corpses to deal with at Abdullah's, and they had given us a great deal of trouble.

Sudden death is not unusual in the Kasbah, but it is difficult to report such cases frankly to the police.

Abdullah insisted that any such naive avowal would infallibly have resulted in his place being searched, after which *tubibs* whose stupidity was only exceeded by their officiousness would diagnose "death by an overdose of intoxicants." And then:

"Good-by! You can go and smoke somewhere else for the rest of your lives!"

This was such a disheartening prospect that we did our best to rid the den of its first corpse as quickly as possible.

God save me from ever coming to such an end—thrown into the street on a heap of garbage! But we could not do otherwise. For the clatter of the nailed boots of the Zouave patrol suddenly resounded at the foot of the street in which I was bringing up the rear of the funeral procession. I gave the whistle we had agreed upon as a signal. And Bébert and the Russian dropped the body where they could, instead of carrying it on to the place where we had wished to give it a decent burial.

As for me, I joined them as quickly as possible.

Which is why I can testify that the street smelled of rotting sardines and spoiled melons. Afterwards, we had to smoke all the rest of the night—to forget both the fact and the smell.

We had an easier time with the second corpse. The man was small and as light as a child. The Russian carried him over his shoulder like a sack of grain, rolled up in a piece of cloth.

He was a man of the yellow race, dressed in blue—probably a ship's stoker. For there was an Argentine vessel in port,

and when she sailed, the captain announced that one of his men was missing. But this time we were able to provide a decent burial.

Bébert, who had fought in China too, told us what an importance those people attach to their mode of burial and what prices some of them do not hesitate to pay for a coffin. We could not, however, go quite so far as to give him a real one.

But we at least bought a chest decorated with flowers and birds and sentences from the Koran, such as we Moslems generally use for wardrobes, strong-boxes, or trunks.

Arrived at the spot we had chosen, which was a piece of waste land, we put our man in the chest by doubling him up, and let him down into the grave we had dug behind a hedge, in the shade of a fine eucalyptus.

It all took a long time and we barely got away before dawn. If I tell these two stories, it is to make my readers understand that what we found so difficult with men of normal size would have been impossible with one of Said's dimensions.

But he was not to die yet, and he came back to us two nights later, said no more than he had said on his first appearance, smoked only a little, and quickly fell into the peaceful and perfect sleep which some hold to be only the lot of the just.

Yet Said was probably just—although he had not always been content to kill cattle. Once he had executed men, and his name was not derived only from his functions in the municipal slaughterhouse of Algiers.

Said was a Kabyle, and in Kabylia "killer" is the name of a sort of paid executioner.

It is a profession which seems to have existed among us from the beginning of time. And until the arrival of the Christians, it was exercised with general approval. If nowa-

days it has to be practiced more or less secretly, it is because the French seem to think that Moslem methods of justice are not as good as their own.

On our side, we are unable to admit that a man who has come here from France is a better judge of our honor than ourselves. Therefore we continue to support and honor "killers."

I might never have known that Said had held this high office in the *bled* if Bébert, one night, had not felt like greeting my arrival with a bit of comedy.

Instead of saying, as he usually did, "Good evening, Mourad!" he cried:

"O Mourad, son of Brahim, son himself of the Ahmed Shelifs, I salute you."

Said was already stretched on his mat. Suddenly he started up, as if Bébert's greeting had been a needle that had pricked him. He sat up and asked:

"Are you really the son of Brahim ben Ahmed Shelif, of such-and-such a place?"

I said yes, and he lay back on his mat, began to smoke again, and then fell asleep.

In the morning—I had forgotten his question—he began to mutter in a very low voice:

"O Mourad, listen well . . . I am one indeed—son, grandson, and great-grandson of killers. And your venerated father once saved my father from the worst of deaths." (He was doubtless referring to the guillotine . . .)

When most of the smokers had left, Said told me the story in more detail.

Ten years earlier, his father had had to take refuge in our *duar* at night. At dawn of the same day, some thirty miles away, he had killed a certain man of ill life—a cattle-stealer, a grain-thief, and something of an incendiary, whose death was a great relief to the whole of Kabylia.



As he spoke, I remembered that I myself had received and transmitted the news from summit to summit, as shepherds do.

Meanwhile, French justice was alerting its servants by telegraph and setting them on the trail of our sacred executioner.

French justice would have been better advised to have taken the same steps in regard to the bandit, before the event. But even if the gendarmes had caught him, the judges would probably have contented themselves with giving him only a short prison sentence, since it was difficult to prove his many crimes.

Having exercised his functions, the killer took to the brush. The profession requires a certain amount of athletic training, and thirty miles through the brush are nothing to a runner whose only baggage is his gun and who goes barefoot.

He knew too that when he was exhausted he had only to demand hospitality in the first hut he came to.

We cannot refuse to help such a man, but we are relieved when he departs. My father, after having given him food and drink with his own hand, provided him with a mount so that he could escape before the women's tongues started clacking. Better to lose a mule than your freedom, and the fact is that the gendarmes appeared in our *duar* the same morning.

My father, who was in the fields, was sent for—and naturally it took a long time to find him, and doubtless he did not hurry on his way back to the *duar*. When he arrived, the following dialogue took place between himself and the leader of the gendarmes.

“Are you the chief of this village?”

“I am.”

"Can you swear on the Koran that you did not give shelter to a bandit last night?"

"I can . . ."

"Then do so!"

Said stopped acting out the scene, and said in a muffled voice:

"He did it! He did it! To save my father, he swore a false oath on the Book of Books, at the risk of losing Allah's confidence forever . . ."

It was not for me to deny my father's virtues. But I could easily see how, by the help of one of those mental reservations which we like to employ as a means of deceiving Christians, he could have taken the oath without perjuring himself.

For in his eyes, as in the eyes of all Kabyles, the killer was an officer of justice, and not the common-law criminal whom the Frenchmen were seeking.

"And thus," said Said, "my father escaped the justice of the infidels. And if he died nevertheless, as a result of getting overheated on his long run and contracting a chill on the chest, he at least had a death worthy of a true believer and could appear before Allah with his head still decently attached to his body."

We were alone. It was broad daylight, and Abdullah's other customers had already been obliged to return to the prison of their lives.

Said went on:

"For many years after his death, I in my turn—with God's help—killed men or women who had deserved death, according to our law.

"But now the French offer so much money for the apprehension of a killer that soon there will not be a man in Kabylia noble enough to refuse the reward. It is the end for

me! From now on, I shall kill no more, except at the slaughter house . . .”

Suddenly he threw himself at my feet, his forehead in the dust:

“But you—you are not like that . . . you are the son of a man among men . . . So . . . Whenever you wish . . . Wherever you wish . . . However you wish . . . You need not even open your mouth . . . Just let your eyes show me the man or woman who has offended you. And it will be their last heartbeat!”

I took it for one of those lyrical exaggerations which are habitual among Moslems.

And a night spent smoking kief slows up your reactions and dulls your conscience.

Said had risen . . . I thanked him quietly, as if he had offered me something which I could accept.

Besides, what use would it have been to protest! . . . There are things done daily in the *bled* which seem impossible when you are in a great city, surrounded by civilized people.

And that morning, each of us went his own way.

C H A P T E R

• 2 I •

I HAVE to make an effort in order to remember the precise sequence of the events which followed.

I was smoking more and more—and certainly far too much. So people and things and days passed before me as if in a mirage. Time no longer existed, and every day I escaped farther and farther from life.

From time to time, however, one or another of my friends would force me to take part in one of the real pleasures of this world.

Thus I was obliged to celebrate Charles's success in passing his final examinations.

I rejoiced in his success because Charles was pleased by it—although, in the peculiar state in which I found myself, such things appeared to me a little ridiculous.

Germaine was expecting her second child. She scolded me . . . I didn't look well, I was leading a stupid life . . . It

had been months since they had seen me . . . That was no way to behave.

I promised whatever she asked, just to make her stop talking. I was very fond of Germaine, but her perfect health, her cheerfulness, her equability were intolerable to me. Normal people all got on my nerves in those days . . .

Some time later, Papaluet gave a great celebration. He had found the estate of his dreams. It was on the coast, not far from Algiers. It had cost him half a million.

"You understand, son, if you were anyone else, I could say it cost more, and they wouldn't know if I was bluffing. But what I need is to know inside myself that it's no bluff! . . . Five hundred thousand francs! . . . Dio Cane! . . . Me! And I can't even write! . . . or read! Poh poh poh poh!"

This happy housewarming of Papaluet's was to be followed by many black days. Indeed they mounted into months.

At the beginning of winter, a bad attack of grippe had made me very ill, although from the first I had followed my usual method in such cases, lying down on a mat with a jug of cold water within reach. But it was impossible to obtain complete silence from Yamina. And I was made all the more restless by knowing that my school was in the hands of an inexperienced substitute.

Such being the case, I had to resume my work before I was completely cured. And I was still in the state of weakness which is characteristic of convalescence when I was summoned to the police station in the Rue Marengo to answer a charge. It seemed that Yamina had been guilty of insults to, and assault and battery upon, the person of another Moslem woman at a public Moorish bath. The young woman in question had permitted herself to demand the services of the Negro masseuse at the same moment when her services

were wanted by Yamina, who still passed as my wife, though she was such only in name.

But it was enough to make me legally responsible.

The Rue Marengo police station (it is at the foot of the Kasbah) is a highly instructive place. Day and night, in an interminable procession, pass through it such inhabitants of the old town as happen to be demanding speedy justice. One has had his wife stolen . . . Another his goat . . . Yet another has been swindled out of a fortune in douros or bills . . .

At any other time I should doubtless have taken a certain philosophic pleasure in observing these people. But I was still convalescent, and consequently rather irritable. However, as the police lieutenant politely remarked, since I was a government employee it would be better to avoid an appearance in court and to pay the complainant's husband the sum he asked. (The complainant still bore visible testimony of my wife's fury in the form of scratches on her forehead.)

I paid it.

Afterwards, I gave Yamina the punishment she deserved, and for a time she made no more trouble.

A few more weeks passed and I learned a piece of good news—which, however, gave me no pleasure.

Zina's aged husband, who had long appeared to be at the point of death, suddenly revived. The doctors in Tunis talked of a miracle. The word I used to myself was not as pretty.

For his resurrection took away my last hope of resuming relations with my former fiancée.

My readers will understand that, under these circumstances, I was all the more disgusted to receive a bill from a certain Mozabite merchant from whom Yamina had bought a large number of expensive and perfectly useless things.

In religion, the Mozabites are the Protestants of Islam; in business, they are clever men. Their shops are real bazaars.

Besides vegetables, fruits, spices, sweets, and preserves, they sell perfumes, materials, amulets, henna, bead necklaces, incense, and make-up.

They are, of course, too shrewd to extend credit to the wife of an insolvent man. Yamina wept as she told me that she did not know what things should really cost and that the Mozabite was a great thief.

This time I did not even tire myself by beating her. But after paying the Mozabite, I asked Lalla Urida to board my wife for a certain sum, which I undertook to pay once a month with my rent.

I added that I should prefer to have her come to my school for the money, if possible.

This would obviate the necessity of my giving Mina money to handle; it would give her no further opportunity to pretend that she had been cheated; and it would spare me the unpleasantness of seeing her at all.

Lalla Urida consented. She appeared to feel sorry that I had such a wife, though at the same time she said it was the just reward for my apostasy. According to her, I had a shameful tendency to sympathize with our conquerors and I had too many Christian friends.

We also agreed that, when I needed linen, I would send Cirta for it with a *kufin* tied to her neck.

I could not foresee to what this course of conduct would expose me.

My dog had long aroused such a fierce jealousy in my wife that she had dared to insinuate that Cirta and I had relations which it was impossible to describe in decent terms.

It is true that in Africa relations of this nature sometimes spring up when men have no other means of satisfying their desires.

Such was not my case, and my love for Cirta was not impure.

On the evening of May 3rd, I innocently sent my dog home for some toilet articles. An hour later, she had not returned, and I sent out for the Rue Sophonisbe myself. I felt somewhat surprised, but not uneasy.

Cirta never delayed when she was on an errand for me. But she might have been shut up in the house by some stupid person or some mischievous child.

As I walked, I expected to meet her at any moment, but I reached the house without having seen her.

The street door was wide open. I began to feel uneasy as I entered it . . . In the center of the patio, surrounded by a group of stupefied women, lay Cirta—dead, or rather, assassinated.

According to the veterinary for whom I sent—although it was only too obvious that there was nothing more to be done—the dose of poison she had been given must have been extremely strong. She had not even had time to suffer.

This agreed with the testimony of Lalla Urida, who had been a powerless witness of the horrible occurrence.

She had taken the basket and my list from Cirta's neck and then had either followed or preceded my dog (she did not remember which) to the door of my apartment to get the things I wanted. (As Lalla Urida could not read, the list consisted of pictures.) Cirta had remained outside, and had just finished lapping up the contents of a small pottery bowl when the old lady came out . . .

Then Cirta had lifted her muzzle, looked at Lalla Urida in horror, and whirled round. Before she succumbed, she had managed to drag herself to the foot of the stairs, as if she had wanted to reach the street for help. But death had taken her first.

As for my wife, no one could say where she was . . . although she had been in the house at the time my dog reached it. Nor did anyone know who could have set out the bowl,



but each of the women could take an oath that it did not belong to herself, and Lalla Urida turned pale at the thought of all the children who trotted about the house and who could so easily lay hands on things which did not concern them and put anything and everything into their mouths.

Then I covered Cirta with my old burnoose and went to Abdullah's to ask Said to help me with what remained to be done.

He started when I told him that Cirta was dead. He had admired her greatly, and I had promised him a puppy from her next litter. But he asked no questions and followed me docilely.

I helped him to put Cirta onto his back, and, folding my old burnoose, I covered the corpse with it.

As we were going out the street door, we met Mina, who had decided to come home. She was gliding along by the wall.

I did not even give her time to explain her absence to me. I cried, in one breath:

"You poisoned Cirta. I know it. You were seen mixing the poison!"

There was no confounding such a woman. She replied without hesitating, and her tone was a perfect combination of amazement and despair:

"Ya Allah! Is it possible? . . . But who would ever have supposed . . . Who could know that she would drink it? . . . The poor creature! . . . The stupid creature! . . . We have so many rats in the house—no one could blame me for putting out a little dish of poison for them . . ."

She was weeping. Weeping at will was one of Yamina's most highly developed talents . . . I could have killed her just for her hypocrisy. I stepped toward her and said:

"Madwoman, you lie! . . . You killed the best dog in the world on purpose—to hurt me. I ought to kill you too, to

prevent you from doing any more harm. This is what you deserve!"

And I ripped off her veil and spat in her face. And instead of turning away his eyes—as a Moslem man does when he might see the face of a woman who is not his near relative—Said stared at her avidly, fixedly. He seemed unable to take his eyes from her. But Yamina, who had paled at the insult, fled into the house howling, and we went on.

When we left the house, it was not yet quite dark. Night had fallen when we reached the Cemetery of the Princesses, which was deserted at that hour. Nevertheless, to make sure that we should not be disturbed, I bolted the door.

Then I waited for the moon to rise, for the street lamp gave us only a feeble light.

And when the moon had risen, I still had to find a suitable place for the grave.

In the Cemetery of the Princesses, there is not a foot of ground which is not occupied by a tree or a corpse. And the paths between the tombs are narrow, and Cirta's ghost would constantly have been trodden by the boots of tourists.

So I thought that it would be best to put her in one of the oldest tombs. And with Said's help, I unsealed the marble slab which marked the last resting place of one of the three N'Fissa princesses.

To judge by the many years they had been buried, I supposed that there would be nothing left in their tombs; yet there were a few bones in the one I had opened. I removed them, stretched my Cirta out at full length, and then replaced the bones between her paws.

Then, before sealing the tomb again, I stood for a time, lost in thought.

That which lay before me in the form of an animal body had been more tender, more devoted to me than many human beings who claimed to possess minds and souls.

Cirta had done more for me than any living being.

When I was a child, she had helped me to tend my father's flock, to outwit the treacheries of other shepherds.

Later, she had been the messenger of my loves.

She had mourned my dead brother with me . . . She had aroused the unwilling respect of the bad boys in my school. She had guarded my little Muna.

She would have fought to the death to defend me.

I should never find such a friend again.

But . . . It was written . . . I must resign myself. We threw the heavy earth upon her, and Said adroitly replaced the marble slab on which is inscribed the famous name of N'Fissa and a Turkish poem setting forth the beauty, the gentleness, the loyalty of a woman among women. Yet, save for the name, it would have served as well for the best of dogs.

Then we went to Abdullah's, and there we smoked all night.

But in the morning, before school, I thought I would go and tell Papaluet what had happened, and I told Said to follow me. He certainly deserved a cup of coffee for his services.

C H A P T E R

• 2 2 •

PAPALUET let his two big

hands fall on the bar.

"What! . . . What are you trying to tell me? . . . Why I saw her yesterday, in the afternoon . . . she was carrying her *kufin* like a housekeeper. She even put it down to say good afternoon to me—she rubbed my leg with her muzzle . . . And, after that . . . you mean to tell me someone killed her?"

I said yes and told him whose furtive hand it was that had struck the blow. He appeared to be choking, poured down a long drink of wine, and found his tongue again:

"*Dio Cane!* . . . It will be better for your wife if she never comes past here . . . And you—you ought not to stay married to her another day! . . . What are you waiting for? . . . Hurry up! Run! And when you find the *Kadi*, cry: 'Justice! Justice!' . . . Look out! Ho! . . . If you don't do it today, tomorrow it will be you she'll be murdering . . ."

But I shook my head.

"No, not yet." And I said that perhaps I should never be able to repudiate Yamina.

And while Said began his breakfast, I explained to Papa-luet the real reasons for my patience.

Since my marriage, I had never returned to Upper Kabylia.

(Why should I give some people the satisfaction, others the pain, of seeing that I had made such a bad marriage?)

But, upon one pretext or another, Abd-el-Kader had come to my apartment several times, to obtain ocular testimony to my misfortune.

It had not been possible for me to hide it from him entirely. But having at last learned—through my brother Lakdar—what my former friend's real feelings were, I had been careful to utter no complaint and had even disappointed his hopes to the best of my ability.

Leaving Yamina to her filth, her disorder, and her bad temper, I had taken Abd-el-Kader to the Upper Kasbah.

There we had found a great number of beautiful and amiable girls; and several of them who were old acquaintances of mine had received us well and treated us even better.

We had taken our meals in celebrated Arabian restaurants, we had had our fill of good music in Moorish cafés, where I had gaily exchanged greetings and pleasantries with several customers whom I knew quite well . . .

After that I had taken him riding in streetcars and taxicabs and boats, and even to the movies.

Abd-el-Kader could not help seeing that, in a great city, and to a man of my experience, the joys of family life were not as indispensable as they would have been in the *bled* . . .

Here I had constantly at my disposal a harem whose variety and numbers were fabulous . . . I had many friends . . . My pockets were full of money . . . Amusements, entertainments, pleasures filled my nights and my days . . .

In his eyes, it was a catastrophe, and a cruel blow to his honor besides.

He had counted upon reveling in the misfortune he had patiently planned for me, and suddenly he found himself in the presence of a man who would not have changed places with a *kaid* and who seemed to consider himself impregnable . . .

Abd-el-Kader could not at once accept the wreck of his hopes. Patiently, tenaciously, he had renewed his visit to me—twice, three times. Each time he hoped that at last he would find me unhappy, but each time I had seemed rather more content with my lot. I had even concealed my grief over the loss of Muna.

Lakdar told me that I should have done better not to play my role of the happy man so well, for it had only increased Abd-el-Kader's hatred of me.

The unfortunate thing was that, on his last visit, he had found Mina alone in the apartment. She had seized the opportunity to complain:

No, I was not at home . . . I was never at home now, day or night . . . Nor was I likely to set foot in the house until she had been driven out of it herself! . . . Ah! Ya . . . yaie! . . . Yes, she was sure that I wanted to repudiate her, and in spite of her youth and her virtue I would manage it if no one defended her! . . . Ba ba ba!

Abd-el-Kader had promised her help and protection and had set out to find me. But it was a Thursday, the school was closed, and he did not know the way to Abdullah's. Without waiting, he had returned to our *duar*, where he had once conferred with Mina's relatives. Then he had spoken to Lakdar as follows:

"His stay in an impure city and his long contact with Christians have corrupted your brother Mourad. People say he is thinking of repudiating his wife, although she has not

betrayed him . . . We cannot therefore permit him to turn her out, and we are ready to maintain the poor innocent's good cause by force of arms if need be . . .”

Abd-el-Kader appeared to be intoxicated with fury at the thought that after I had been clever enough to live happily outside the shadow of a loathsome married life, I might now free myself from the threat of future evils by repudiating my vixen.

However, Lakdar had added, it seemed likely that this declaration of war was a mere bluff, intended to frighten me.

For my part, I was more inclined to believe that Abd-el-Kader's hatred had gradually increased to the point where he really wanted a fight between us, believing that his usual luck would make him invulnerable.

As for the consequences of such a quarrel, the bloody “*rekba*” which it would loose on the soil of Kabylia . . .

Papaluet interrupted me:

“Just a minute! What is a *rekba*?”

And Saïd raised his face from his bowl (which we had filled twice to show that we had not forgotten him), and looked as if he were saying:

“How can there be anyone who doesn't know about such an important thing?”

I answered:

“A *rekba* . . . head for head . . . is the Kabyle vendetta. It sometimes lasts for generations, wipes out whole families, causes set battles between tribe and tribe—even if the beginning of the quarrel is idiotic and concerns nothing more than pasturing an animal on private land, or the so-called ‘rape’ of a willing virgin . . .

“And it goes on until the day when it has to end because there is no one left to fight. And then it becomes a legend and inspires other men to kill one another in their turn—on and on and on . . .”

Papaluet gave an admiring whistle:

"Macarérol! What men you Kabyles are! . . ."

I shrugged my shoulders. When I was still an ignorant shepherd and such things had affected the fates of people whom I did not know, I too had thought them worthy of admiration.

But now that I had learned to reason better, and the drama threatened to include myself, I thought them utterly stupid.

I refused to admit that such a woman as Yamina could be a reason for exterminating honorable and useful people . . .

I could not forget that, when he left for the front, my brother Ali had entrusted his sons to me.

So I had decided to put up with Mina—forever if necessary—rather than bring such a danger upon my family by repudiating her.

It was not a showy form of heroism, but it was as good as many others . . . And if, finally, God should be touched by my spirit of sacrifice, He would find a way to deliver me from my terrible wife Himself. *Inshallah!* . . .

Said shook his head, pushed away his empty bowl, and left. It was time for him to go to his job.

Then I too rose, and set out for my school.

And the days went on . . .

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Cirta had been poisoned in May. In June, the Governor gave a garden-party in the gardens of his summer palace at Mustapha. I had received an invitation because I was a government employee, and Charles, who was also invited, urged me to go with him. My state of persistent torpor worried him.

Since I had lost Cirta, I had been smoking more and eating hardly anything.

If, until then, I had taken my meals more or less regu-

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larly, it was because, at the proper hour, Cirta would tug at my coat, and raising her golden eyes to me, would seem to say:

"If you aren't hungry yet, think of me!"

Now I would even have forgotten to perform my ablutions and say my prayers if the Killer, who was extremely pious, had not been careful to remind me of their importance. He said:

"If you want Him to punish your wicked wife, do not forget to ask Him every day. And five times is better than one."

Said spoke very little, but when he did he said something vital.

And a hint was enough to make him understand me.

In the state of unhappiness and depression in which I found myself, I did not often want to talk . . .

Yet I did open my mouth one evening, before beginning to inhale my drug, to tell the Killer—and at the same time to inform my other smoking companions—that I was invited to the Governor-General's next reception, but that I did not yet know if I would go.

For vanity is the most widespread of human vices.

But Samba showed no surprise. Grimacing hideously, he said:

"Right, friend . . . Those 'ceptions no good . . . Always too hot . . ."

Bébert assumed his most disgusted expression:

The Russian, with that distant look which he assumed when he talked about his old life, said:

"When I get an invitation like that, I do this with it, even if it is on cardboard . . ." (It was a symbolic gesture, for there was nothing in his hands . . .) "For twenty francs, I can have one tomorrow if I want!"

The Russian, with that distant look which he assumed when he talked about his old life, said:

"Do people still give receptions? Receptions like one . . . Every guest had spent a fortune . . . I sold a whole estate with the standing grain, the serfs, the cattle . . ."

As he spoke he looked as if, moving across the opposite wall, he saw a procession of images so dazzling that he had to shut his eyes.

And I felt humiliated—realizing that the reception to which I had been invited would never assume such splendor in recollection.

But Said leaned toward me:

"Don't listen to them . . . Go! Yes, you must! . . . For yourself, for your family . . ."

To hear him, you would think that the whole of Kabylia would share in the honor I had received.

Next morning, Papaluet was equally energetic in urging me to go:

"Ho! See here . . . What's got into you? Swelled head, or what? . . . The *Gover-nor* invites you, and you don't know if you can go! . . ."

And during the next days he left no stone unturned to provide me with decent clothes and the proper accessories.

The Killer did the shopping under Papaluet's direction and was continually questioning me about the least details of the reception.

"What time does it begin?"

"What time does it end?"

I said that even if it went on late, I intended to leave fairly early, and return to Abdullah's.

But Said at once said:

"No, no! . . . You must stay! You must give everyone a chance to see you! You must talk to everyone!"

Really, he was beginning to get on my nerves! Only such a simple-minded fellow would attach so much importance to a Governor's reception . . .

The day came. I went to Papaluet's and dressed. Then I set out for the Summer Palace.

Its immediate environs were crowded with a mass of spectators, whom a cordon of spahis kept at a respectful distance. As I passed through the lines of the honor guard, I thought that I recognized Said in the rear of the crowd . . .

Few men are so tall . . . And a certain scarf which he usually wore around his neck or on his head and whose combination of blue, green, yellow, and red, was more violent than anything one is accustomed to seeing, even in such a colorful country as ours . . .

But Charles, who arrived just at that moment, clapped me on the shoulder, and I forgot about the Killer and entered the Summer Palace with Germaine on my arm.

I spent a very pleasant evening.

Charles introduced me to the more scholarly among the guests, and I had the good luck to encounter M. Ferdinand.

It had been long since I had seen him . . . He had aged in appearance, but his mind had retained all its old sparkle.

"Ah! There you are! Come this way!" He took my arm. "Still composing poetry? Are you satisfied with your life? Ah—your pupils are scoundrels, are they? We'll see if we can't find you another school soon . . . As for me, my work is killing me. I don't even have time to play chess at Baya's these days . . . But let's get out of this crowd."

He led me to the buffet.

Kief is good, but so is vintage champagne.

When M. Ferdinand and I had drunk to Africa, to Algeria, to France, to poetry, he left me to go to bed.

I was tempted to follow his example. But Charles intercepted me just as I was leaving the palace.

"It's barely midnight! Don't go . . . I want to introduce you to the Governor! . . . It might be useful . . ."

He did so, and that high dignitary talked to me for at least

two minutes in sight of the entire assembly—though what he said, by the way, was completely trivial.

After which, I showed Charles the way to the buffet, and we drank toasts together.

If I had not drunk, could I have borne being deprived of kief?

I could not help thinking of Abdullah's . . . It was as if I were there . . . Samba was laughing . . . Bébert was humming a song . . . "Love . . . Dove . . . Heart . . . Dart . . . Part . . ." The Russian was dreaming aloud . . . The Killer . . . What would the Killer be doing?

Germaine said:

"Mourad . . . Mourad . . . What are you dreaming about?"

She and I had decided that night, with Charles's permission, to address each other as "tu," and afterward we continued to do so. Germaine had drunk something too, but much less than we had—just enough to make her a little more beautiful, a little gayer, a little rosier and more affectionate than usual.

When the three of us left the Summer Palace, the cocks had long since begun to crow.

It was six o'clock. My school opened at eight. I had time to perform my ablutions and say my prayers, to drink a cup of coffee with Papaluet, who would be delighted to hear the story of my evening . . . But first I would go home and change my clothes.

After such a wonderful night and with the help of the champagne I had drunk, I felt able to face my vixen in person.

Besides, it was more than likely that, lazy as she was, she was still sleeping.

When I reached the door of the house, I found such a dense crowd that I could hardly make my way through it . . .

You would have said that the Summer Palace reception

was being prolonged here . . . But it was a very mixed company . . . Water-carriers . . . Prostitutes . . . Housewives . . . Zouaves . . . Beggars . . . and even policemen . . .

It was one of the latter who, when I had finally reached my own door, put his hand on my shoulder:

"Who are you? Where are you going?"

"I am Mourad, the schoolteacher, and I am going home."

"Where have you been?"

"At the Governor's garden party."

He took it for a joke . . . It was true—fortunately for me. Because while I had been there, where countless people could see me, Yamina's throat had been cut.

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She was on the floor in her room, amid a disorder which the police investigation had only increased. Her wound encircled her neck like a wide purple necklace . . . The cut, said the doctor, had been skilfully made . . . The murderer was no novice . . .

I turned away from the shattered body, and among the incredible assortment of objects that littered the floor, my eyes fell upon a square of blue cotton ornamented with figures in yellow and green and blue . . .

There was a characteristic odor in the room, too . . . The odor with which the clothes of habitual kief-smokers eventually become impregnated . . .

But I was already being hustled into another room to be present at the interrogation of Lalla Urida.

She knew very little . . .

At twelve o'clock . . . Yes, she was certain . . . For whom did they take her? . . . She knew how to count! . . . Twelve—that made the fingers of both hands plus thumb and forefinger. (And the wind carried the chimes of the clock in the Place du Gouvernement to the house) . . . So, at twelve

o'clock she had thought she heard steps on the stairs . . . Soon after, someone had opened the door of my apartment . . . Then there had been a brief dialogue . . . No, not loud at all . . . More like whispering . . . The door had been shut again while she was asking herself whether it was I or someone else who had come to visit my wife. She had made up her mind to speak to me about it the next morning. It was not for nothing that her residence bore the sign:

"DECENT HOUSE."

And then she had gone back to sleep and slept till dawn . . .

The matter was soon disposed of. It was summer . . . Half the judges were on vacation; when it is so hot there are always dramatic happenings in the old Kasbah! . . . Yamina must have had a lover . . . or several . . . And one of them had killed her . . . As for the fingerprints, they did not correspond with anything on file . . . But it was clear that the murderer had enormous hands . . .

Personally, I had been cleared in the eyes of French justice from the beginning, as my alibi was of the sort which is not open to question.

But in Kabylia, a man knows only too well that he can be guilty without having actually taken part in a crime . . .

So one morning my brother Lakdar came to see me, and what he told me was so serious that I thought M. Ferdinand ought to hear it.

Abd-el-Kader refused to admit the validity of my alibi . . . If I had not killed her myself, I had inspired and paid for the crime . . . And he was going about telling everyone that the Christians knew perfectly well that I was the guilty man, but that they were protecting me because I was a renegade in their service.

Mina's parents hesitated to believe this. But he was so determined to convince them that it was questionable how long they would hold out. He even went so far as to say

that if no one would follow him, he would dispatch me by himself.

M. Ferdinand, after listening to Lakdar attentively, asked a few additional questions in regard to Abd-el-Kader, his position, his resources, his morals, and his manner of life. Then he said:

"I am certain that Mourad is innocent . . . And we can no longer permit the people of the *bled* to take justice into their own hands."

Soon afterwards, Abd-el-Kader, who was not particularly honest, was caught receiving stolen cattle and condemned to many years in prison.

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Some time later, although the shock of the tragedy had rather violently cured me of the kief habit, I returned to Abdullah's.

Abdullah was playing chess . . . He said quietly:

"*Saha!* . . . You may come in! . . . Yes, there are people here, but not many of those you know . . . The Russian is 'walking the roads' along the coast. He sent me a postcard. He has lost his servant. And no one knows where he is . . . *Manarf* (all is doubt)! He disappeared one day when his master was going to beat him as usual . . . Nowadays, everyone wants to command and no one to obey . . . Samba is out of the city too. He is looking for a *marabut* clever enough to make his legs grow again . . . But you will find Sidi Bébert."

He mentioned no one else, and I did not dare to ask any questions.

Before entering the smoking room, I stood at the door and looked at the reclining forms. None of them was as bulky as the one I feared to see.

I entered and made my way to Bébert. He sensed my presence, half opened his eyes, and said:

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"Greetings! . . . Glad to see you . . . We'll talk later."

I found a place, lay down, and smoked for a long time.

My head was full of dreams and the pallid light of dawn was filtering into the room when Bébert murmured into my ear:

"They're all asleep . . . Listen . . . Said has gone. . . . In the coal-bunker of the *El-Biar*. Must be in Paname (Paris) by now . . . Good-by . . . Mourad!"

Yes, it was good-by, for I have never gone back to Abdullah's.

Nor have I ever seen Said again. And I hope that I never shall.





P A R T

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## • 23 •

AFTER the tragedy, my superiors conceded that it might be unpleasant for me to continue to reside in the Kasbah. At the beginning of the October term, I was appointed to a school in Belcourt.

From the foot of the Kasbah to the outskirts of Belcourt is barely a half hour's walk. Yet it was as if I had moved from one world to another.

The Kasbah is hilly and colorful. Belcourt is flat, gray, and crowded with factories and machine-shops.

I found an apartment in a street which overlooks the suburb, on the second floor of a villa. An old Italian named Cesare owned it. In his youth he had dealt in wine. Now he did nothing but drink it.

An elderly Fatima kept house for him. She frequently argued with him and always came off victorious. Her voice was extremely powerful in the upper register, and her blasphemies were obscene beyond anything. It appeared that, in

her youth, she too had sometimes stood waiting in the Upper Kasbah.

"But when a woman gets old, my son . . . she has to work with her hands . . ."

She was scrupulously clean and never stole anything but sugar and coffee and a bit of soap. Never money, except change—and then only if it was left lying around.

She consented to clean my apartment for me.

As for my meals, I went out for them. There were plenty of working-men's restaurants in the neighborhood, and I had advanced beyond the stage of believing that the French put pork in all their dishes.

Besides, among the patrons of these restaurants there were as many of my fellow-believers as there were Christians. Here the relations between Moors and Latins attained a degree of cordiality which I had never encountered before.

You would have said that they were all members of a single family, gathered together under the sign of poverty. No more conquerors, and no more vanquished. Only men who had learned how hard it is to live.

Some of the workers who sat next to me at meals had worked in the factories in the suburbs of Paris or in the north of France. Their brothers or their sons worked there still.

The conversation was in French, but sometimes a Moslem would use a word of Parisian slang, or a Christian a native expression, if it seemed best suited to the subject.

They exchanged invitations. A Christian would invite a Moslem to his son's wedding. A Moslem would invite a Christian to join him in celebrating the Feast of the Sheep.

I should certainly have made friends with some of these fine men, if, during the first winter after I moved to Belcourt, I had not encountered Selim and if the encounter had not completely changed my manner of life.

Selim was distantly related to the Ben Ahmed Shelifs

through the female line; I used to see him sometimes at the *duar*, where he sometimes visited. Since those days, he had acquired a great reputation.

He came from a family in which the craft of illumination descended from father to son. But whereas his ancestors had been content to follow tradition and devote themselves to adorning the pages of the Koran, Selim had undertaken to reconstruct the modern history of our race in a series of illuminations as precious as enamels.

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I encountered Selim one Thursday in November, by the grace of God and through the instrumentality of a sudden and violent shower which caught me in the middle of a street in the French town. Seeking a doorway in which to shelter, I saw one by which hung a placard:

#### "EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS"

"Free"

I was not much interested in painting, but the rain had become torrential. I went in.

In the outer room stood Selim, apparently listening respectfully to an old gentleman with a decoration who was talking . . . talking . . . and who showed no more intention of stopping than the rain did. So Selim, the moment he saw me, bowed to the old gentleman, crossed the room, and spoke my name.

But for that, I should hardly have recognized him. I had remembered his marvelous eyes, and now he was wearing black glasses.

Perhaps, too, I should not have dared to approach him because of his fame. But he had remained perfectly simple, and he began to talk to me about our Kabylia in a warm

deep voice which was as velvety as his eyes. (To see me better, he had removed his dark glasses.)

Later (the rain was over), we went out to eat together somewhere—I have forgotten what we ate. What we ate did not matter, it was what we said that was important.

When we had finished our dinner, we still had not finished our talk. He accepted my suggestion that he should walk home with me. When we arrived, he stayed. From confidence to confidence, until the night was half over, each learning the vital facts of the other's life. It was dawn when at last I walked home with him.

A week later, we were never apart—that is to say, I went to meet him every night at the "Friendly Bar."

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The proprietor of the "Friendly Bar" had abundant, drooping mustaches, in which he seemed always to be sniffing the bouquet of a noble wine.

His wife was short, thin, and ugly. Her eyes were rimmed with red. She wore her hair on top of her head in the shape of a turd.

The place itself had nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other bars, but it was located in the center of Algiers, which was convenient for people coming from different parts of the city.

So, every evening from six to ten, a group of artists met there. Among them were painters, sculptors, musicians, journalists.

The painters were in the majority. They were not all Africans, some spent only a part of each year with us. For example, Jean the Painter . . . I cannot call him by any other name, and his real name matters little. Essentially and primarily he was a painter.

He was from the Vendée. He had a fair complexion, a

sharp nose, and eyes of a clear blue which anger intensified. He could be as gay as a child, and he could fall into terrible rages. He spoke of Renoir as men speak of God.

He had had no academic training and had never set foot in the École des Beaux-Arts—except to pull off a practical joke. He was exceptionally gifted.

The Kasbah was his country.

As soon as he got off the boat, he hurried there, and he had spent his time there ever since in a state of frenzy which would have been enough to intoxicate him even if he had not also drunk in every pothouse.

Manille was a painter too. He was not without talent. But as a clown he was a genius.

His physique was right for the part. He was absolutely bald, and his thin white face was completely hairless. No lashes, no eyebrows, no beard. It was a stripped mask, on which it was easy to play the whole gamut of grimaces, with every variety of expression.

Branguen was of Nordic origin, stood six feet two and a half in his stocking feet, grimaced when he thought he was laughing, and looked like Verlaine. He was a connoisseur of feminine beauty, he loved children, and he tried to right social injustice. This was always leading him into adventures which upset his peace of mind and which obliged him to write under different names for publications he despised in order to pay off the debts he had contracted in the service of charity.

He almost never slept, spending his nights in editorial rooms. To keep awake, he drank quart after quart of very strong black coffee, which he alternated with gulps of anisette . . . He was never drunk, but always boiling over with ideas and words. He talked as a motor runs.

There were two musicians in our group. The younger was affectionately known as Charlot. He had studied in Paris.



He went back frequently, but he could work well only in Algiers.

His compositions were already numerous, and would have been far more so if he had not been afraid of the gifts of facility and charm which were his by birth.

He wanted to compose nothing but austere, hermetic, tortuous works, incomprehensible to the vulgar, and struggled systematically to destroy his natural spontaneity and inspiration. But from time to time he yielded. A little spring cannot always keep from laughing, even if it aspires to become a raging torrent.

The other musician, a violinist, believed that art should be charming. It was two concepts, two generations, face to face. They frequently quarreled—the more so because the old violinist had a very cantankerous disposition. We overlooked it out of respect for his age and his talent, and also because of his wife. In years, she could have been his daughter. In gentleness and wisdom, he was a child compared to her. She was the queen of all the graces. She was not pretty, if being pretty means having perfectly regular features. When she laughed, she was beautiful, and she was always laughing. She was as gay as a bird.

And then—a body plump in the right places and slender in the others. The arms of a statue, and a skin with a bloom like a fruit. But if she was always laughing, she was always sensible too. And adultery was not the fashion in our group. We left that to the solid citizens, who nevertheless pretended to believe that the "Friendly Bar" was a rendez-vous for lost souls and debauchees.

Yet nothing was more innocent than our meetings.

In addition to its zinc-topped counter, the "Friendly Bar" had a few tables. Two of them were reserved for our group. There we drank—usually in moderation. And there we sometimes ate too—provided that some son of the Mediterranean

came in and sold chances on one of the fish with which he had filled his *kufin* by fishing for an hour at the end of the mole after he left his factory or his workshop.

At a franc a chance, and with each of us taking one, we were sure to win, because there were so many of us.

Then the proprietor's wife would have our fish cooked for us while it still tasted of the sea. We ate, we drank . . . we resumed our talk. When the "Friendly Bar" finally closed its doors, we set out for another. Or in good weather we went to the mole, to enjoy the marvellous view. Algiers spread and mounted before us, shining with thousands of electric globes under a sky bright with stars.

After looking for a while, we grew confused, we no longer knew which were men's lights and which God's stars. On the roads the automobile headlights seemed like meteors fallen from the clouds. The tops of the hills seemed to reach the top of the sky.

We liked it so well on the mole that sometimes we stayed until daylight, alternately waking and dozing.

We were awakened by the light of dawn falling on our faces, by the voices of fishermen bringing in their laden ships, with the full nets trailing astern.

Far away, the mountains of Kabylia were golden. Close at hand, the Kasbah was emerging from the mist in blue and rose and mother of pearl. Unreal . . . precious . . . fantastic . . . It was like a mirage . . . But no . . . We closed our eyes, opened them again . . . It was still there!

We entered a waterfront café and, our appetites whetted by the sea air, we devoured broiled sardines, fried squids, we drank very strong coffee.

I would return to Belcourt by the first train. Old Cesare, who would be getting up, would say, with a yawn:

"Bring her home with you. You'll get more rest, and spend less money!"

And Fatima, seeing that my bed had not been slept in, would make a disapproving face and say:

"If you go on like this, you'll lose your hair and your teeth and everything else . . ."

I would smile without answering. Appearances were against me, and, no matter what I said, no one would believe in my innocence.

Then I would shut myself in my room, not to sleep but to get down on paper my impressions of our magnificent night, with all its rhythm and all its music.

When I had composed some of these poems I read them to Selim, together with those I had written long before I knew him.

He thought them so good that he wanted to share them with our companions at the "Friendly Bar." And then Charlot wanted to set "Dance, O Baya," and "When I Smoke, I Dream" to music.

I did not see why he should. A poem worthy of the name is harmony in itself. But it was difficult to refuse. And Charlot, abandoning himself to his native inspiration for once, composed two melodies which were to become extremely popular.

WHEN vacation time arrived, I took leave of my new friends with regret. But it had been long since I had seen my father, he expected me to come home, and I have already said that the Ben Ahmed Shelifs were not in the habit of opposing the noble old man's wishes or commands.

So I set off for my native land without delay. I found it greatly changed.

As a celebrated Christian orator (a member of the Financial Delegations) expressed it:

Kabylia was at last tolerating the entrance of machines and ideas!

Now you could go from our *duar* to the nearest town in ten minutes; formerly, it took me two hours to make the same journey on foot. And now on market days, the road resounded with the roar of motors and the crash of backfires instead of with Koranic formulas of benediction.

For shrewd businessmen had seen the opportunity, had

put a fleet of heterogeneous vehicles more or less into running order, and were loading them with Kabyle peasants at one or two francs a head, according to the distance traveled. Sums which would have seemed immense before the war and which no one would have thought of spending merely to save himself a little exertion. But now money, being easier to earn, was spent more freely.

Only a few die-hards "walked the road." They usually had white beards. My father, as much for dignity's sake as for economy, preferred traveling more slowly on donkeyback or muleback to being loaded into a conveyance as cattle are loaded.

He was becoming handsomer and more imposing year by year, for he had always led a healthy, simple, and dignified life. You could see it in his eyes.

And his prestige as chief of the *Jemma* continued to increase, and his fame for wisdom had spread far beyond the boundaries of our *duar*.

In the tumult, the chaos, the fermentation of new world-values, my father did not lose sight of the vital thing—that is, the preservation of the race—and he was often able to solve delicate and difficult problems in a way to further that end.

Many of our people, no longer content with the monotonous and frugal life of the *bled*, were leaving home, to work in the far-away factories of France. Most of them were wise enough to send a considerable portion of their wages to those of their relatives who had remained at home, and the latter at once used the money to buy parcels of land which colonists were selling after having made their fortunes. These lands were then stocked with sheep.

And thus, little by little, through the efforts of their exiled workers, the Kabyles were reconstituting the fortune in land of which their conquerors had dispossessed them long ago.

The postoffice in Azazga had become too small to accommodate the crowd of fellahs who stormed the wickets on market days to cash the money orders they had received from Boulogne-Billancourt or Lens and to deposit the amounts in their savings account.

But Good and Evil are inextricably mingled. Sometimes one of our workers would come home bringing a Christian woman he had picked up in some dive, or an honest working girl whom he had deceived into believing that he was the son of a *kaid* and that a wonderful life awaited them in North Africa.

The reality was quite different—often he already had a wife and children here at home. Then there were screams, protests, threats of violence, and my father would have to try to persuade the authorities to repatriate the unfortunate creatures.

Other workers brought us back fatal diseases. In order to send their brothers more money, they had stinted themselves of food and at the same time learned to drink too much. And their lungs dried up in their fevered chests.

Tuberculosis began to ravage our *duars*. And but for my father's wisdom, drunkenness would have infected them too.

But he decided that each time a Kabyle appeared in public obviously drunk, he should be fined in proportion to his resources. Some would have to give only a chicken, others a whole sheep.

Rather than pay such fines, the Kabyles gave up drinking. Or if some of them did continue to drink, it was in moderation. And my master at once composed a written report on the success of my father's new measure.

He had recently begun to translate our ancient *kannuns* into French, with the intention of publishing them. Because they had never been put in writing and published, they were

totally disregarded by the French judges, who contented themselves with applying their own laws to us.

This immense labor undertaken by my master would be so useful to us who are Kabyles that we cannot but hope that God will prolong his life beyond the usual span in order that he may complete it.

He had already retired on his pension, which gave him more time to devote to this work. He had also opened an information bureau in the city, for natives only.

If one of our people was harassed by the tax bureau, by usurers, by his landlord, or by anyone else—were it the highest French administrative authority—he now knew where to find an experienced, trustworthy, and generous adviser, who would charge him very little, or even nothing if he was very poor.

Among so many absorbing occupations, my master also talked of taking Ali's two sons into his house at the beginning of the October term.

Until now, they had been under the care of women. But they were reaching an age when they were ready to extend their education beyond nursery tales and stories of the exploits of our legendary heroes.

My father said that he would send food for them each week. I undertook to pay the other expenses. I insisted upon their being trained to wear shoes at once. I did not want them to suffer the tortures I had gone through when I had belatedly put on the armor of civilization. And Rassim, the elder, young as he was, already yielded so unwillingly to constraint and discipline that if he were not made to wear shoes at once, no one would ever be able to make him. So, at least, Lakdar told me, and he had had more opportunity than I to study Rassim's character.

My young brother had just married. Although he was always affectionate and loyal, the attraction which is exercised

upon a youth of his age by the first woman of whom he is complete master could not but prevent him from spending as much time with me as he used to and as I might have wished.

At last, on July 20th, Selim came to visit me. Those were marvelous days. We strolled, we tramped, and when we were tired of tramping and drunk with fresh air, we lay down in a field—wherever we found ourselves—and dreamed aloud.

A whole month passed very quickly in this fashion, and I would gladly have spent another like it, if Selim had not been obliged to return to the city to do some work.

I went with him.

We found Algiers intolerably muggy. We sweated as if we were in a Moorish bath. In the heart of the city itself, at the "Friendly Bar," it was unbearable. Yet we found Manille, Jean the Painter, and Branguen there. But I succeeded in persuading them to transfer our sessions to some airier place until the end of the summer—Bab-el-Oued, for example, where Papaluet had opened a huge beer-garden at the sign of "The King of Beer."

It glittered with mirrors and nickel, and had an immense bar in purple and gold lacquer and wonderfully soft leather benches.

Papaluet, to put himself in harmony with his elegant setting, had somewhat altered his style of attire. He wore checked golf-breeches, silk shirts—sky-blue or pale pink—and elaborate ties. On his little finger he sported a platinum ring set with an immense diamond. His hair was carefully plastered to his skull with lustrous brilliantine. From behind his bar he haughtily directed the movements of a half dozen white-coated waiters.

But let him only recognize in some idling passer-by a friend of his childhood, and he emerged from his gold and



purple retreat, dropped his splendid isolation, jumped across the bar, and ran out into the street, calling:

"Ho! Micalaète! . . . Come here a minute . . . Do you recognize me or don't you?"

Nor was he satisfied until the friend had entered his establishment and received a free drink. Then there were bursts of laughter, and a volley of "*Dio Canes.*" And, to serve his old friend something "*taiba*," he would roll up his sleeves on his muscular arms, no longer caring whether anyone saw his tattooing or not.

When he had turned his bar in the Kasbah over to a manager and set up in the grand manner close to his natal suburb, he had paid good money in an attempt to have these marks of youthful folly obliterated. But the only result had been that the siren's outlines had become a trifle wobbly.

Jean the Painter assured him that it would have been a pity if the tattoos could have been obliterated, because the designer had been a splendid artist. In proof of which, he asked for permission to copy them. It was instantly granted.

Papaluet was a great success with my new friends. On his side, he was so taken with Manille that he soon commissioned him to decorate his villa.

It goes without saying that he did not consider expense. But he was afraid of the strange representations which over-intellectual people sometimes make of natural objects and he begged Manille to stick to the truth of earth, sea, and sky. He said:

"Come, come! Better make them natural looking from the start . . . You can't think up anything better—not you. Because it was God who made them in the first place!"

And Manille promised to respect the forms and colors of a sunlit earth, sky, and sea.

And he promised that he would set to work as soon as the summer was ended, when the hottest weather would be over.

As a retainer, Papaluet immediately paid him a sum which made it possible for him to buy a secondhand car which he had long wanted and thanks to which we were soon making gay excursions in the environs of Algiers.

When Manille bought the car, it was a hideous khaki color. With the assistance of Jean the Painter, he transformed it into a sort of lady-bird—red with black trimmings. We decided to call it *Rossinante*—because it panted going uphill and rattled going down and took three hours to cover the thirty-five miles between Algiers and Tipaza.

True enough—though it was built to carry four, we loaded it with five or six, plus a large quantity of bedding and kitchenware.

Algeria is scattered with antique ruins. At Tipaza there is a private estate which contains extensive remains of a good-sized old Roman town.

The estate is open during the day to visitors from all over the world, but at night its gates are closed. Manille, who had friends everywhere, knew the custodian. As a special favor, we received permission to stay in the grounds as late at night as we wished and even to build a fire.

I would undertake to light it, while the rest scattered through the village, looking for provisions.

The fire would already be blazing between the antique blocks out of which I had constructed a hearth in the Berber fashion.

My friends would return, bringing meat, bread, wine, fruits. From Jean the Painter's shoulder would hang a net squirming with red mullets, weevers, and dace, colored like turquoises, rubies, and gold.

We would set our table on an overturned sarcophagus, and draw up others to serve as benches.

"I am sitting on Caesar!" Manille once said. But after so many centuries, it was no longer irreverent.

After lunch, which was a long-drawn-out affair, we would take a nap in the shade of the olives. On waking, we would explore the ruins. The forum and the circus were still clearly traceable.

Then we would go swimming in one or another of the little streams which watered the estate.

At nightfall we would sup on the remains of our abundant lunch. Usually the moon and the stars would give us all the light we needed. When it was too dark, we would turn on Rossinante's headlights, or Jean the Painter would set off Bengal lights.

The temperature was perfection; neither hot nor cold, a real bath of pure air, just warm enough. Each of us would find a spot in the sand to make up his bed.

At dawn the air became a little chillier, but my faithful burnoose was a good and sufficient blanket.

And we would wake to a new day of happiness, while the birds sang in the wild olives and far away, in the direction of the mountainous mass of Chénoua, an Arab shepherd pre-luded on his flute.

We would sometimes remain for several days, living this paradisiacal life. And afterwards we talked of our excursions to Tipaza with so much enthusiasm that Papaluet wanted to come too, and when he had visited it once, he returned many times.

That made things considerably easier for us. His car was large, and he loaded it generously with bottles.

But he never spent more than a day with us, both because of his business and because he considered sleeping in the open air a depraved taste. He said:

"Come, come! I'm not fool enough to sleep like a beggar when I have two houses with furniture and everything else!"

After a few rains at the time of the equinox, an unusually

warm autumn allowed us to continue our bivouacs at Tipaza until November.

But as my vacation had ended on the first of October, from then on I used to return to the city with Papaluet on Sunday night. Selim would stay over until Monday with Manille and a young sculptor who had recently arrived from France . . .

He was as handsome as the Apollo in the museum at Cherchell, but there was something shifty in his eye which ought to have put us on our guard from the first.

And the fact is that he found a means of temporarily estranging Papaluet from us.

Jean the Painter had secretly painted a large portrait of Papaluet.

He appears in it posed before a background of sky, sea, ships, palms, naked women, playing children, a heap of flowers and fruits. He wears a sailor's jersey, his arms are crossed, his tattooing exposed. His tanned face is naively illuminated by the joy of living in such a land and by all the cocksureness of strength.

Even someone who had never seen Papaluet could not help realizing that it was a good likeness and that somewhere in the world there lived and breathed such a man among men.

Manille said that it was as fine as a Renaissance canvas, and Branguen was in ecstasies over it. As for me, I found myself unable to say anything. Before a great work, one always fears the littleness of words.

For two days even Jean the Painter seemed to believe that he had pulled it off. He stood us to drinks. But the third day we had to take the canvas away from him. He wanted to destroy it—it was worthless. Manille had to hide it in his apartment.

Nevertheless, by the following month, Jean the Painter had calmed down sufficiently to allow it to be hung in a big

exhibition at Algiers, where it aroused various shades of opinion. The whole city filed past it, and Papaluet learned the news from the young sculptor, who maliciously urged him to go and see it for himself. When Papaluet had seen it, he flew into a terrible rage, shouting:

"*Dio Cane!* . . . You—you who are like a son to me—you bring me that Jean and he makes a cartoon of me—without even a word—so at least I could put on a suit to hide my tattoos—they make me ashamed—and everybody is laughing at me—it's too much! . . . Get out! Get out! Out of my sight!"

No matter what I said, he refused to listen. And it was not until much later that he realized his mistake. That was when several people showed him copies of various important Paris magazines—particularly *L'Illustration*—in which "The African" was referred to as a masterpiece which had recently been acquired by the Luxembourg Museum.

## ♦ 25 ♦

THE following winter and spring are impressed on my memory because they brought me a particular piece of luck and several strange events.

Charlot, who had gone to Paris expressly for the purpose, found a publisher for "Dance, O Baya!" and "When I Smoke, I Dream."

On the eve of publication, they were given a first performance by a famous music-hall star. She made them a hit.

Later they were to be translated into several languages and sung in many countries, and soon they had reached the entire world on records and over the radio.

When the publisher saw that they would be successful, he offered us quite a large sum for an option on our future work. We accepted. And Charlot, as soon as he returned, began orchestrating "Cirta, Most Faithful . . .," "The Shepherd Speaks, the Mountain Answers . . .," "At the End of the Mole," and a few others which I had written during the previous summer.

From the beginning, Charlot and I had adopted a pseudonym for our songs. He, because he was proud and did not want people to know that he was composing such light music. I, because I had something to consider too. It is not fitting for a native teacher to draw attention to himself by a show of unusual talent.

As for the money, I divided it into three parts:

One, which I spent gaily in the company of Selim, Manille, Jean the Painter, and Branguen.

Another, which I succeeded in making my friend Charles accept as a loan. He was struggling with the sort of difficulties whose pettiness makes them only more trying. He had passed his examinations in History and Geography while Germaine was giving birth to their third child. The new boy was as well formed as the others and perhaps even more beautiful. Yet neither Germaine nor Charles had been able to smile at him whole-heartedly and with perfect content.

For the new little mouth would oblige the mother to effect prodigies of economy and the father to do extra work.

To eke out his low salary, Charles had to tutor French after school. Then he spent half the night making up for the time he thus lost. He was preparing for his examination for a professorship, which was the end and aim of his life.

For him it was what painting was for Jean the Painter, poetry for me, and money for Papaluet.

Charles was my Christian brother. So it was quite natural that I should come to his assistance. Furthermore, I found it rather amusing that it should be the profits from two songs which would give him an opportunity to attain the highest peak of French culture . . . Two songs composed by a "*bicot*," to use the derogatory term which some of our conquerors employ at times to humiliate us even more deeply.

As for the remaining third of my money, I put it away in my amulet, to Selim's great amusement. He said:

"O savage of savages! Do you not know that there are things called banks?"

I answered:

"How can one trust such institutions? Remember what happened to the fools who subscribed to the Russian Loan . . . And the amount is not big enough to buy a strong-box for!"

But I was not even to keep it around my neck for very long.

For, soon afterward, the South was visited by a great famine, provoked by the will of the Devil and the malice and stupidity of the rest of creation—that is, by drought, locusts, usurers, and that Moslem shiftlessness which rather too often leaves it to God to look after everything.

"*Inshallah!*" is soon said, and then you wait under a fig tree for the figs to ripen and fall into your mouth.

Naturally, under such circumstances one curses the locusts, the usurers, and the shiftless. But then one cannot help emptying one's pockets to prevent the famine, and more especially the typhoid which is its inevitable result, from spreading.

Yet this time it did spread, despite people's charitable contributions, for the administration had not stepped in soon enough and energetically enough to eradicate the scourge, which was soon to reach even the outskirts of Algiers.

On the day I am now to describe, I had found Germaine and Charles quite uneasy over the risk of infection for their children. And I had done my best to reawaken in them a confidence which I did not myself wholly feel.

And now I was returning on foot by the highway, keeping close to the ditch in order to avoid being sideswiped by one of the numerous tourist cars, which, driven far too fast, were returning to Algiers on that cold and beautiful Sunday evening.



My father often said:

“As a result of relying on machinery, men will soon be unable to walk, and women will give birth to children who will have to be fastened to machines at birth because their legs will be atrophied!”

It was a good subject for a burlesque song and I was trying to find the best way to treat it when I thought I heard a sound in the ditch . . . something like a feeble cry . . . Perhaps a little frog . . . Then silence . . . I was about to go on . . . The sound began again, not much louder, but perfectly distinct. A human cry—no doubt of it. So I took the trouble to climb down into the ditch.

There lay a long pale form. Dressed in white . . . so cold . . . No, it could not have been she who had cried . . . She would complain no more . . . But there was something moving upon her breast . . . The something began to whimper again . . . I bent and took up—I tried to take up—an infant. How thin it was! . . . And I did not dare to squeeze it . . . It almost slipped out of my hands . . . I held it close to me.

Again I was by the side of the road . . . A car passed at full speed . . . In the glare of its headlights, I was able to see a pale face, a little mouth which was making sucking movements . . . It was hungry—yes, of course . . . But where to turn for help? . . .

I was far from Maison-Carrée. And as for trying to stop one of the passing cars, I did not consider it . . .

For even if they had showed signs of stopping, they would have instantly set off again at seeing a plainly clothed moslem with a dirty and ragged child in his arms.

And suddenly I heard the clanging of a streetcar bell.

I was not far from the stop . . . My legs found all their old racing speed . . . I reached the pole before the streetcar . . . But would it slow down? . . . The stop was not an obligatory one . . . The streetcar was coming close . . .

Then I raised the child above my head, like a signal of distress, and shouted:

“Ya Allah!”

God was with us. The motorman was a Moslem. The streetcar stopped.

It was the last car. It was almost empty. Besides the motorman and the conductor, who was a native too, there were only three passengers aboard when I got on. They were sleeping.

They had paid their fares only as far as Hussein-Dey, which is half way between Maison Carrée and Algiers. However, they were transported to the end of the line for the same price without knowing it, because they were asleep. And when they woke, all they had to do was to go back on foot, after insulting us. We did not even answer . . . We felt that the right was on our side and that we had acted under the compulsion of absolute necessity. For if the motorman, at the conductor's order, had not skipped all the stops, it is probable that the child I had found in the ditch would not be alive at the time I am writing this.

The conductor was Mahmud. He became my friend from that day. And the child was the real miracle of my life.

So Mahmud and I bent over the fragile little form, listening for its uncertain breathing. And we revived it as well as we could with our own breaths, and also by tapping its hands and its colorless cheeks . . .

But the child no longer had even the strength to open its eyes, and no more cries formed in its dry throat.

Mahmud sat down beside me on the bench in the first-class compartment, which was better upholstered and on which I had laid the child. He said:

“Give it to me!”

He was unbuttoning the tunic of his uniform, under which he wore a pink silk vest embroidered with gold. This

he also opened, exposing a hairy chest with bulging muscles, and he offered his man's breast to the child's mouth, saying:

"I have seven at home, and only one wife. And when she is on the terrace, doing the washing, sometimes the youngest cries and wants to be fed. And, to quiet it, I do this."

His face winced.

"But mine don't bite me . . . Gently! gently, little jackal, or you will tear my heart!"

When we reached the terminal, Mahmud's chest was bloody, but the child was still breathing.

We ran to my apartment. Fortunately it was not far away.

Without even taking time to warm it, we dropped several spoonfuls of condensed milk into the voracious little mouth.

It wanted more. But Mahmud insisted that we might kill it if we went too fast. We could feed it again in a few minutes. Meanwhile, we would wash it and change the cloths in which it was wrapped. They had acquired the color of sand and dried mud.

I spread my old burnoose on my bed and watched Mahmud, whose big hands moved with an adroitness and gentleness which were feminine . . .

The cloths were dirty, but only with the dust of a long journey. There was no sign of vermin in them . . .

"Its mother was a good mother . . ." Mahmud murmured.

But I could not restrain an exclamation of disappointment.

For, until that moment, I had believed that I had saved a male child. And the removal of the last cloth showed that I had been wrong.

Mahmud raised his face—a round, kindly face with honest, peaceful eyes. And from his big, thick-lipped mouth, expressive of both gluttony and kindness, he let fall:

"*Inshallah!* . . . Yes! . . . It is God's will . . . Today He gives you a daughter . . . I have seven, and yet I do not complain!"

She slept until dawn—a deep sleep. I was bending over her when she opened her eyes. Big bright black eyes, almost as beautiful as my little Muna's . . . And her eyes looking into mine, and the memory which they awakened, were enough to melt my heart. Then, sketching a smile which made her emaciated face fall into innumerable tiny wrinkles, she said, in a single breath:

“Ya . . . *Ba* . . . *ba* (Papa)! . . .”

Then I ceased to regret that she was only a girl.

) (

When I recounted my adventure at the “Friendly Bar,” Selim said that he did not see why I should undertake the role of guardian.

“You saved her—splendid! . . . Now take her to an orphanage!”

Branguen began to shout:

“What did he say? . . . An orphanage! . . . Mourad had better have left her to die on the highway! Orphanages!” He knew them! How many times he had investigated them and written about them! An orphanage! The poor brat! “If she is too much trouble to you, Mourad, let me have her instead!”

Manille said that a little girl was nice but that he preferred monkeys. He bought one every time a ship put in from Brazil . . . Unfortunately, they never lived long. Algiers was not hot enough for them. And Jean the Painter asked:

“Is she pretty?”

I could not yet say yes, I could not say no. Because she was so thin, so wasted, so disfigured by privation that she hardly had a human face. And because no one—except God—could know whether she would recover strength enough to live.

I spent a week making her recover it. Fatima helped me, as well as Cesare—who, if I had listened to him, would have had her sucking at old wine. Mahmud came every evening after work to see how the rescue operations were progressing.

The child had a strong constitution. After two weeks of proper feeding, baths, naps in the sun, she became what she must have been before her great trial.

And then I had the courage to take her to the "Friendly Bar."

There were a good number present that night, and my little girl won every voice.

"Beautiful! . . . Wonderful!"

She could not understand, but she smiled at them. And now when she smiled a dimple appeared in the middle of each round dark cheek.

Her eyes were almost too big, her mouth almost too small. As in the famous poem:

"A single grape would have hidden it . . ."

She exhaled a slightly savage grace, composed of dignity and an astonishing calm, amid the tumult which surrounded her.

Everyone asked:

"Do you know her name? Where do you think she's from? How old might she be?"

I answered that she must be about two, and that all she could say yet was "*Ya baba . . . Ya mamma . . .*" And that I had named her Zakia, because after I had tried the effect of many names on her, she seemed to recognize that one.

As for knowing where Zakia came from! . . . Nothing had been found on the body of the woman who must have been her mother, and who had been given a decent burial after I had applied to the proper authorities. The medical report had been "death from natural causes"—in other words—starvation.

Perhaps Zakia was a little Tuareg. The Tuareg nomads are said to descend from the Crusaders; the symbol of the Cross is frequently found on their arms and jewels, and Zakia had seven small blue crosses tattooed on her charming face.

Whereupon Manille said solemnly:

"Queen of the Hoggar, I salute you!"

He remained with his mouth wide open. For, as soon as he spoke the word, Zakia drew herself up and gave him a perfect military salute.

At least we knew that she had lived somewhere near to a French army post!

After that she came to the "Friendly Bar" with me every evening.

She adapted herself to everything with astonishing ease. She never blinked and never coughed, despite the dense smoke from our pipes. Nothing frightened her—not Manille's grimaces, nor Branguen's smiles, nor Charlot's thundering tones when he defended modern music.

When she was tired, she never said a word—she simply rolled herself up on the bench like a kitten, and all I had to do was to cover her with my old burnoose. She could sleep through the noise of the most violent arguments, and when I picked her up to take her home she did not grumble as most children would have done—she half-opened her eyes, smiled at me, and laying her head on my shoulder, went confidently back to sleep.

You would have thought that she had always lived in the midst of noise and excitement and bustle. Yet she could stay alone and amuse herself quietly for hours with the jade and amber necklace which Jean the Painter had given her as a reward for her patience. It was a wonderful necklace, but Zakia never degraded anything. And he said that he had never had such an amenable model.

He made innumerable drawings and pastels and water-colors of her, for he had a sort of natural innocence which made him an admirable interpreter of a child's ingenuousness and charm.

I was proud that such a gifted young man should find Zakia interesting. Yet at the same time I was displeased at having him paint so many pictures of her—pictures which would be sold everywhere and to anyone.

The best of portraits, painted with the greatest love, may fall into evil hands, and then nothing can prevent devilish or impure thoughts from following the model.

That is why the Koran forbids the reproduction of the human face.

I did not dare to say this in the "Friendly Bar," but I took Zakia regularly to a certain *marabut* in Belcourt who had the reputation of protecting children in particular, and he exorcised her.

And presumably Zakia's portraits did not fall into evil hands, for she was never ill and all through her childhood she never gave me occasion to complain or to grieve.

Thanks to her, I felt that I had a home, a family, without undergoing the constraint and the unpleasantnesses which often result therefrom and for which my bad marriage had left me with a permanent distaste.

And when Zina, from whom I often received rather melancholy letters—for her husband was still alive, though he had fallen ill again—asked me, "Don't you ever think of marrying again?" I could answer: "Why should I marry again? I live with you in thought, and Zakia is already almost our child."

I did not mention the "Friendly Bar." For women are often jealous of feelings which they cannot understand and of amusements which they cannot share.

Thus passed seven years of marvelous sweetness.

I N 1930 Algiers celebrated the Centenary of the Conquest—that is to say:

*“The anniversary of the deliverance, by French arms, of Moslem peoples bowed beneath the Turkish yoke.”*

Such was the formula composed by M. Ferdinand to spare the sensibilities of the conquered while at the same time allowing the conquerors to demonstrate to the world the everlastingness of French colonial glory.

Some of our people found it hard to swallow. However, there is a kind of politeness which should not be confused with hypocrisy.

This formula, which its inventor launched as early as 1923, was instantly taken up, repeated, and circulated by the press and the radio.

And then the rush of buying and building began. One man bought an old house to remodel, another a plot of ground for a new building.

And all to provide suitable lodgings for the visitors who,



if one might believe the optimists (and they were legion), would come running from all over the world.

Megalomania is contagious. Papaluet was not the last to be infected.

During the last few years his "King of Beer" had brought him a large fortune. He invested it—as well as money from other sources—in building the "Centenary Hotel."

This edifice in the Western style would be able to accommodate two or three hundred people. Its roof was to be a terrace planted with oranges, oleanders, geraniums, and other foliage or flowering plants, after the manner of a hanging garden.

The street floor was to house an immense movie theater (the largest in the city), which would be named the "Majestic."

In Papaluet's current state of delirium, he took the least word of caution as an insult and was indignant at my lack of enthusiasm:

"*Dio Cane!* Has the world turned upside down, or what? All you used to say was, 'The Christians are all stingy.' . . . And now you say, 'Watch out, old boy, you're going to ruin yourself!' I'd like to know if we can ever do anything to please you Arabs!"

Papaluet always confused Arabs with Kabyles, and it always annoyed me. I told him so once more, and rather curtly—so we parted with hard feelings on both sides.

But when I repeated his remark to Mahmud, who often came to see Zakia and to talk with me about one thing and another, he said:

"It is quite true that when the Christians first came here they preferred money to pleasure. But a hundred years have gone by since then, and in a hundred years they have lost many of their worst habits and adopted some of our best ones.

"Instead of piling up money, money, money in their safes, they are going to give the world this great fantasia. And just look at them in the street . . . If they still sometimes go out with their wives, at least their wives walk behind them and carry the packages.

"And another thing—although the Christians try to hide the fact, they all have more than one wife, in a manner of speaking. Which is better for everybody.

"For themselves, first of all. Because fidelity is monstrous, unhealthy, and contrary to what nature demands of men, who are made to plant their seed wherever they can.

"For their women too, because there are almost always more women born than men. Better that several should be satisfied by one man, than that some should never be satisfied at all.

"And there are many other signs of their willingness to follow our good or bad example . . . Listen to them shouting '*Akarbi!*' Especially when they have made up their minds to do the opposite of what they have promised you . . .

"No one on earth, except our own *kaid*s, is as clever as they are at taking with one hand the thing that they modestly refuse with the other . . .

"Lastly, the wisest of them have lost the mania for speed and work which ruins the best moments of life . . .

"Another century or two, and we shall have successfully colonized them, perhaps . . . For we are five million Moslems against less than a million Christians. And every day, and five times a day, prostrate toward the Holy City of Mecca, we pray to our God that so it may be."

To return to the Centenary celebrations:

While every citizen, transformed into an investor in glory, fell to building houses, hotels, and movie theaters, the Government too began ordering more or less durable monuments, which were not all made out of cement. So the writers

were commanded to write, and M. Ferdinand invited me to show my strength in the chorus of praise.

But inspiration does not always come at the desired moment, particularly on a given subject. So I abstained, consoling myself with the thought that there would not fail to be other writers who would do better. The fact is that more than a hundred set themselves to composing books, pamphlets, theses, and articles. And afterward an equal number of literary prizes were created to reward the talents of these amiable cutters and snippers of prose.

Nor were the plastic arts neglected, and certain frequenters of the "Friendly Bar" received their share of manna.

Manille was ordered to design posters, prospectuses, advertising pamphlets, and he found himself forced to hire a team of artists and set them to work under his direction.

As for Selim, all the illuminations which he had on hand were purchased and others were ordered. M. Ferdinand wished to present them to our most illustrious guests.

Music is an indispensable ingredient of properly ordered festivals. So Charlot was commissioned to revive and refurbish old military marches of the 1830 period.

He did a good job. But the modern cantata which he composed was unfortunately less well received.

Yet, despite all the effort, everything was not quite ready when the great day came. But it appears that such is usually the case on occasions of this nature. So when our guests disembarked, they showed no surprise at having been invited to inaugurate scaffolds behind which there would one day be superb buildings or glorious monuments.

The President of France arrived on board a battleship, and it was decided that he should land at the old Admiralty basin, on the very spot where, long ago, the Barbary corsairs had sacrificed so many Christians.

No one even took the trouble to remove the marble tablet

which recounted this regrettable fact. But no one except Branguen, Selim, and I even thought of looking at it. The world had its eyes on the Future, not on the Past—that is to say, on the open ocean across which the supreme messenger of France was to come to us that day.

The more to honor him, Christians and Moslems, civilians and soldiers, had all donned their finest garb.

Prefects, sub-prefects, administrators of mixed communes, employees of the General Government and the Conservation Department, even the gendarmes, wore insignia of silver.

Gold had been reserved for Generals and their subordinates.

On the Moslem side, the cast was even more resplendent. The *aghas*, *bash-aghas*, *kaid*s, and sheiks graced the occasion with robes in which purple was the dominant color and which were embroidered with precious metals.

Branguen muttered that they must have done a lot of “making the burnoose sweat” \* to pay for such clothing!

For Branguen was a man who always thought of the suffering and weariness of the poor.

But the handsomest of all the proud cast were the Tuareg chiefs. And in their case it was not entirely a matter of clothing.

They were tall, straight, proud—you would have said two gigantic palms. Their right hands grasped damascened lances, and what was visible of their faces (for they were half-hidden by the black veil which prevents the sand from filling their mouths and nostrils when they gallop over the vast Sahara) looked like masks of gold. Their eyes, like the eyes of eagles, could stare straight into the sun.

They had traveled for months, crossing the entire desert, to salute the Chief of the French State. And now, disdain-

\* The traditional North African expression for the way in which the rich pluck the poor in this world.

fully relegated to a station at some distance from the rest, they seemed fascinated by the immensity of the ocean, which they were beholding for the first time.

Branguen approached them. The only language he knew really well was French, but he had a sort of sign-language of his own. In conjunction with a jargon which he called "my Esperanto," it gave him the power to make himself quickly understood by anyone. However, I did not have time to follow his mimed conversation, for the first ship of the presidential escort had been sighted and signaled, and like everyone else, I had my eyes glued on the horizon.

Then there were certain tidal movements in the crowd. The master of ceremonies had decided that he wanted those present placed in accordance with their rank, and everyone claimed the right of precedence.

I amused myself for a while watching the officials shoving and trying to climb over one another. And the ship which bore the President was already entering the harbor when, turning toward Branguen, I was stunned to see that he was holding the nomads' weapons in his hands and that they were sitting on the edge of the dock, dangling their legs delightedly and washing their feet in the sea water.

I hurried to Branguen.

"Wretch! What have you done?" For I never doubted that it was he who had urged the poor innocents to bathe their feet in this scandalous manner at such a moment.

But Branguen shrugged his shoulders:

"Wretch yourself! . . . O Mourad! . . . Can't you see how much more important it is for these two men to perform their ablutions in the sea, for once in their lives, than for them to salute a puppet!"

And then I regretted what I had said. For in the tumult and pomp of this great Christian show, I, like most of the

Moslems present, had forgotten the hour of the second prayer, which the Tuaregs were humbly beginning.

In any case, they had time to put on their sandals again before the President arrived. And, after that, everything went well throughout the magnificent review of troops on the boulevard which overhangs the sea.

As for me, the next morning I found I must transform myself into a guide, at M. Ferdinand's particular request.

For I could not pretend that I was incapable of piloting people through the Kasbah, as I had done when it had been a question of writing something in praise of the Republic.

Moreover, ingratitude is not one of the Kabyle vices—and I could no longer count the favors which I owed to that worthy man.

Only recently, for example, a law had been passed conferring amnesty on political and other prisoners. And although at first sight it appeared that Abd-el-Kader's crime might be included in this liberal category, my ferocious enemy had not been released.

Which allowed me to look forward to many more years unshadowed by the imminent fear of a violent death.

So I began conducting a number of Algeria's distinguished guests through the old town.

But these republican *kaid*s and their female companions were sadly ill-bred.

They had hardly entered people's houses before they began asking indecent questions. Such as:

But why more than one wife?

Were they going to veil and cloister the unfortunate creatures forever?

Was it true that they married off their daughters before the poor little things were nubile?—

With perfect dignity, my fellow-believers avoided these shameless questions, pretending not to understand them.

And they never revenged themselves by asking the intruders why they exposed the faces and breasts and legs of their daughters, wives, or concubines to the eyes and the desires of every passing male.

It is always humiliating to find oneself introducing ill-bred people into well-bred households. I soon realized that, in the short time at my disposal, I could not possibly instruct my charges in the most elementary principles of good manners. So I adopted a new procedure, which would at least explain my own part in the matter. Thereafter, each time I entered a Moslem house at the head of my retinue, I cried at the threshold (in Berber or Arabic, as the case might be):

"O So-and-So! . . . O my brother! . . . The Blessing of God be upon you! May He lengthen your days! . . . May He give you seven sons in seven years! . . . And now, excuse me if I bring you people who have no conception of decent speech or decent behavior . . . But they are friends of the Beylik (Government), and I could not do otherwise."

Only one of these people was to behave politely and even deferentially, and it would be an injustice not to mention her.

She was addressed as "Mademoiselle," and her way of bowing, smiling, and looking you in the eye without effrontery showed that she really was a young lady.

She was slight, rather short, with fine, unbobbed, naturally blonde hair, and eyes the color of a ripe medlar; her expression was deeply thoughtful. She was not one of the beauties who conquer you at first sight. But when you looked at her face more carefully, it charmed you by its sweetness, its serenity, the rightness of its proportions. And the least shades of delight, boredom, or surprise were revealed in it with astonishing intensity.

She dressed very simply, in neutral-colored dresses, but

their perfect cut, the beauty of the materials, and her way of wearing them made them precious.

She wore little jewelry, except a pearl necklace and a very fine diamond ring. It appears to have been her engagement ring.

Her shoes and bags and gloves were of light leather, and the stockings she wore on her gazelle-like legs were sheer to the point of transparency

Her father was a rich manufacturer. He was also a senator, and it was in this capacity that he had been included among our guests. His daughter had been very insistent upon accompanying him, and he probably seldom refused her anything.

As for me, I willingly abandoned everyone else so that I might serve as her escort.

For it was a pleasure to offer her the finest and rarest of our country's treasures, because she was worthy of them.

She liked everything likable, and she seemed to understand everything without ever having to ask a question.

Only to her did I dare to talk of my mountains, of my childhood in our *duar*, of my father's nobility, of the so different destinies of my brothers. I took her to see my little pearl Zakia, whose beauty amazed her and whose picture she wished to take away with her as a keepsake.

She became very fond of Grenadan songs, and I also let her hear some of my poems, without naming the author.

The peace of our mosques pleased her so much that I managed to smuggle her—disguised as a Mooress—into one of the most hermetic of them, where no woman of her religion had ever entered before.

Certainly no other member of the official party profited so much from the stay among us.

Just before she went on board ship, she asked me to ac-



cept a considerable sum, to be used for poor and worthy Moslems, at my discretion.

She said that it was the least she could do, and a most inadequate way of showing her gratitude for so many precious moments spent in such good company.

By the time she left, she was calling me Mourad and her friend. But she never addressed me as "*tu*," although all the others had permitted themselves to do so from the first, as if I had been a shoe-black, a water-carrier, or a doorman.

Her Christian name was Marie-Ange . . .

Later, she married a very rich man, and now she has several children.

For the pleasure and happiness of her future sons-in-law, it is to be hoped that her daughters will be like her.

Each year, on the anniversary of her stay among us, I write her a few words to tell her that I have not forgotten her. And, each time, she answers me.

EVERYONE knows what the aftermath of one of these great celebrations is like.

When the guests are gone, there is nothing left to do but to clean up, to put away whatever has not been smashed, to try—with weary limbs and a bitter taste in your mouth—to pick up the thread of your ordinary daily life.

But what has been too long interrupted rarely quite returns to its normal course.

At the “Friendly Bar” our group was never again to be what it had been before. Indeed, in the end, it broke up entirely. Before long, we were in the condition of those defunct civilizations of which no trace remains but their graphic arts. Only Jean the Painter’s murals remained in the “Friendly Bar.”

The sudden death of the violinist’s young wife was the signal for our dispersal.

She caught a chill at one of the nocturnal galas during the

Centenary, neglected to take care of herself until too late, and her illness took a fatal turn.

We were all grieved. As for me, I could not bring myself to believe that never again should I see that smile among smiles flowering on such charming lips.

The violinist was a distressing sight, and as soon as he entered the "Friendly Bar" it seemed as if a ghost, a chill, a fear, had glided in with him . . .

As a result, some who—thanks to the Centenary—had more or less filled their pockets, preferred to go elsewhere and breathe a more salubrious air.

Manille left for Spain and Jean the Painter for Morocco. Branguen went to Corsica . . .

And Selim could not resist the temptation of following their example.

Finally the long vacation arrived, and I decided to go traveling too. My destination was Tunis. Zakia I could leave safely in Mahmud's household.

For several months, Zina—who was a widow at last—had been urging me to come to see her. She had written:

"Do not be afraid that you will discommode anyone or be discommoded yourself. The house belongs to me, and Aunt Zohra will be my only companion all summer."

But it is a long way from Algiers to Tunis, and the speed of the narrow-gauge Algerian railroads is nothing to boast of, at best. Moreover, the customs formalities at Ghardimaous—the frontier station between Algeria and Tunisia—are not of a nature to lessen one's traveling time. It is really a painful journey in midsummer.

Leaving in the evening, I did not reach Tunis until the following day was well advanced, and thus had plenty of time to suffer from the heat, which was bad enough outside but which became atrocious in the train as soon as the metal of the cars was thoroughly heated by the blazing sun. If you

incautiously put your hand on a wall, you were burned as if you had touched red-hot iron.

More than once on that infernal journey I cursed the demon who had made me take such a trip—and no doubt to find at the end of it a bitter disappointment in the person of a woman whom I had not seen for twelve years.

In Africa, even twelve years will transform the most charming virgin into a faded matron, sometimes even into an old hag.

Yet, if I almost failed to recognize Zina on the platform, it was because of quite a different change from the change I had feared.

While I was looking about for a Moslem woman in a long *haik* and closely veiled, the person who came hurrying to meet me was a short woman dressed in a light-colored tailored suit, with nothing to hide her face but the shade of a big white hat.

"Good afternoon, Mourad . . . You're here at last!"

Yes, it was really she.

"Good afternoon, Zina . . . Yes, here I am!"

It had been perfectly easy for her to recognize me. Not only had I changed very little either in features or in figure (I had merely broadened out, as a grown man should). But I was wearing clothes very like those in which she had loved me long ago—that is to say, a wide *sarwal*, an embroidered tunic, and a brocade vest.

Certainly, it was a magnificent costume, if one looked at it from the artistic point of view. Yet, there on the platform, face to face with this young woman in Parisian clothes, I suddenly felt awkward, ridiculous, and, to tell the whole truth, fearfully old-fashioned.

Naturally, Zina and I were careful at the time to make no reference to this matter of dress—though it was of the utmost importance, because it symbolized two entirely oppo-

site ways of thinking and living. And we left the station quickly (I had brought so little baggage that I could carry it myself), making our way through the hurrying crowd of passengers. This saved us from trying—and perhaps failing—to find other words of greeting than the brief and banal sentences we had exchanged under the stress of our meeting and in our surprise at finding each other so different from what we had expected.

And then I took my place beside her in a car which she drove with the ease that comes from long practice.

But there was no possibility of going as fast as such a car would run—here in these streets which were full of pedestrians.

Zina—not forgetting to blow the horn—began telling me the names of the streets we were taking and of the buildings and monuments we passed. Now and again she bowed to some woman dressed, like herself, in European fashion, saying:

“That’s Madame So-and-So, wife of So-and-So, who is the best doctor in Tunis and an Arab by birth.”

“And that woman over there is married to a celebrated lawyer, whom even the Christians consult.”

There could have been no better way of making me understand that she was no shameful exception and that all the Moslem women in the high society of Tunis had adopted the revolutionary methods of revitalizing and modernizing the East recommended by Mustafa Kemal Pacha—whose portrait I was to find everywhere in Tunis.

While I listened, I watched Zina driving. And now, seeing her close to, I became aware of the slight traces which the passing years had left. A darkening of the eyelids, a puffiness under the eyes, a sag in the firm contour of her neck when she turned her head . . . Yet they would have been perceptible only to someone who had seen her in her first

youth, in her absolute purity, when she was as untouched as a fruit on which no finger has ever been laid. And at first sight, it might have seemed that certain artifices made her more beautiful than she had been in the days of her youth. There was a more intense luster in her waved hair—bobbed now, alas! Eyebrows plucked and redrawn into a perfect curve with brown pencil.

Electric treatments, she told me, had finally cured the paralysis in her right arm, and so she had been able to get her driver's license and she could even play the piano.

I congratulated her. Yet at the same time I thought that her infirmity used to give her an ailing grace, aroused in me that ardent desire to protect, which it is so pleasant for a strong man to feel in the presence of a frail woman.

Frail, Zina certainly was not. Her shoulders were broader, she had become muscular.

"I play tennis a lot with my daughters-in-law . . . They are in France for the present . . ."

Her voice had changed most of all. So much so that, if I had not been looking at her lips while she talked, I could easily have become confused and thought someone else was speaking.

Her voice—once so soft, so tender, so submissive, which once could only say "Do you wish it?"—had acquired the habit of command. An old and perpetually ailing husband had gradually abandoned the reins of power to his young wife. It was clear to see.

It became even more so when we reached the house and she ordered one servant to put the car in the garage and another to conduct me to my room.

It was an immense room, containing a very handsome carved wardrobe, which I took to be Louis XVI, and a commode of the same period.

A divan covered with a piece of crimson damask filled one

corner, extremely beautiful rugs were scattered over the floor.

Venetian mirrors and Koranic illuminations in old gold frames decorated the walls.

An immense luster of blue Sèvres porcelain decorated with pink Cupids extended its precious branches under the ceiling.

And before the proof of such vast wealth, I felt myself profoundly humiliated for the second time since my arrival.

One day on a station platform I had light-heartedly taken leave of a weeping, frightened, unhappy girl.

And now she was a rich, powerful, emancipated woman.

And perhaps she had only invited me here to show me her power and to avenge herself for the humiliation I had once inflicted on her.

If that was the case, I should not stay in Tunis long.

Meanwhile, I went into the bathroom to bathe.

After dinner, Zina and I spent that first evening alone together, talking and smoking (I have always loathed the odor of tobacco on a woman's lips). And I soon became aware that, if her outward appearance was changed, if her mind had responded to certain overmodern influences, Zina's heart was still the same, and by some miracle that heart had preserved its faith in a certain Mourad whom, despite his old-fashioned appearance, she seemed inclined to love even yet . . .

Perhaps I only needed to say, "I want it so," and she would have become her old self—submissive, fearful, trembling, gentle as a lamb . . .

Or perhaps, even more simply, I had only to take her in my arms without a word.

And that was just what I could not do.

Because—to make a clean breast of it—even on that first

evening I became aware that in Zina's presence I was insensible, inert, that I remained as numb as an old man.

And when I returned to my luxurious bedroom, it took me a long time to fall asleep, despite the softness of my bed and the coolness which pervaded the room from a large ventilator . . . Because it was the first time in my life that I had remained thus insensible in the presence of a young and beautiful woman, and the fact was strangely disquieting.

I did finally get to sleep, after having laid the blame on my long, hot, and fatiguing journey.

Yet the next day, although Zina appeared in an intensely pink silk dress whose reflection tinted her cheeks, whose lines espoused those of her body, and whose low neck allowed a glimpse of her rounded bosom, and although her skin and her hair exhaled a troubling perfume, I found myself in the same state of inertia in her presence.

It is true that this time I could lay the blame on the overwhelming emotion which had seized me at sight of Aunt Zohra.

She who had taken such pleasure in laughing at everyone for so long had in her turn become a sort of spectral caricature.

She made you think of an old parrot which had lost its feathers. Age had made her even shorter, had shrunk her. Her back was humped, her nose had become enormous . . . And the light of intelligence which had shone so brightly in her eyes was quenched. She did not even recognize me.

And she talked . . . she talked . . . she talked . . . But her memory, which had been so well-stored, was now like a ruined place where nothing remained but scattered bits of sentences, fragments of facts . . . disconnected phrases which she brought out in grotesque juxtaposition. And when she had once managed to construct a sentence, she repeated it interminably, hour after hour . . .



Either Zina had more courage than I, or she had become accustomed to Aunt Zohra's condition. For she seemed not to feel all of its horror. But she certainly realized mine, and she arranged matters so that I did not have to see the old lady again.

During the days which followed, Zina did her best to distract me by taking me to see Tunis and the surrounding country.

I had done as much for her in Algiers, twelve years earlier. But then I was full of ardor. Yes—especially for Baya.

I realized now that I had never felt any strong physical attraction toward Zina. If I was fond of her, it was in my heart and my mind. But in the old days, when we were together, it did arouse some feeling in me to touch her.

Nothing of the kind now . . .

Then I tried to argue with myself. I said:

"O Mourad! Consider what luck has come to you! Here is a woman still young, still beautiful, offering herself to you as clearly as any woman can who is not a creature without shame. And, with herself, she appears to be offering you her worldly goods, which are many, and which, as she has subtly let you know, include not only this house and all the furniture, silver, and art treasures it contains, but also various and sundry shares of stock in railroads, phosphate mines, and other businesses."

But if my mind accepted this philosophic train of reasoning, my body obstinately continued to say "No!"

I tried other tactics. When a child shows signs of being self-willed, it is sometimes best to pretend not to attach much importance to his rebelliousness, and then he will usually start doing the thing that he refused to do when you insisted on it.

So I tried to stop thinking about my disability. But, try as I would, I could not quite forget it. And then Zina, who

saw my air of constraint and discomfort, began doing everything in her power to encourage me to make love to her.

One evening she went so far as to rest her head on my shoulder and offer me her lovely, full mouth, which she now painted and which looked like a geranium blossom beside the jasmine of her complexion.

But it left me as cold as possible, and all I could think was that we would make a wonderful subject for a picture.

She fed me on highly spiced dishes and set the most stimulating beverages before me, and I ate and drank and saw her more and more nearly nude day by day, without the slightest emotion. Her arms, her legs, her shoulders no longer had any secrets from me.

We even went swimming together in the ocean, and all that I felt in the presence of her beautiful body was that I was frightfully discourteous, and yet I could find no way of repairing my discourtesy or even of beginning to.

When I had returned to Algiers and tried—as decently as possible—to tell my friend Mahmud about my unbelievable bankruptcy, he said:

“Someone must have put a spell on you . . . Women have a way of doing such things! . . . Has there never been a woman who was jealous enough of you and Zina to fall back on a trick like that?”

I remembered how much Yamina had loathed my former fiancée, and it was possible that, among the other harmful things she had done to me, she had done this too. Yet I doubted whether the spell could still operate after such a long time and now that Mina was dead.

Branguen, after asking me many questions about my earliest childhood memories, my habitual dreams, my tastes, and various other absurd things, said:

“I see it! To begin with, your old aunt stuffed your head with erotic images of the beautiful Aziba . . . Which has

always made it difficult for you to behave politely toward any woman who looked like a Christian . . . Nothing will do for you but one with long hair and a veil and stinking of musk! . . . So you get off the train at Tunis and find your *mujer* dressed like any stenographer . . . And driving a car, and showing you how independent and modern she is . . . First shock . . . But that's not all . . . She has become rich while you have stayed poor . . . Second shock . . . And you secretly breed yourself what is known nowadays as an 'inferiority complex' and it prevents you from behaving like a man!"

Whatever the truth of the matter may have been, my memory of my journey is decidedly unpleasant.

For after two weeks of absolute frigidity in Zina's presence, I began to believe that overindulgence in pleasure in my early youth and overindulgence in kief a little later had made me prematurely impotent. The thought plunged me into such terrible despair that one afternoon at the *apéritif* hour I left Zina to finish some urgent errands alone and sat down gloomily on the terrace of one of the finest cafés in Tunis, where they are numerous.

I don't know what I drank—I was thinking of other things—and I had just paid the waiter when he—no doubt judging from my clothes that I was a stranger and from my face that I was not enjoying myself—said as he picked up his tip:

"When you feel like amusing yourself a little at night—or even in the daytime—go and knock at such-and-such a door in such-and-such a street and say that Moktar sent you. Moktar is me."

At the time, I pretended to be above such things and left without a sign that I had even heard him. But that evening, excusing myself on the ground that I had met a friend from Algiers and that he had invited me to his hotel, I took leave

of Zina immediately after dinner and set off to look for the house and the street which the obliging waiter had named.

The house did not look very inviting, but in the East exteriors are nothing, and once I had passed through the door and the vestibule I found an extremely clean patio brilliantly lighted and furnished with fine carpets, and I received a hearty welcome from the mistress of the house who introduced her three girls to me. One of them was a dark, strongly-built creature with a rather stupid expression on her well-fed face, but her eyes were black and brilliant and she had long, dark hair.

When I left the house, I knew that I was still a man. I slept serenely the whole night through and the following morning I behaved much more cheerfully and at last seemed to be glad that I had come.

Unfortunately, the conclusions which Zina drew from my changed frame of mind were too optimistic and, above all, too remote from their real cause.

For if I had just proved to myself that I was still capable of virile behavior with some women, it was no less true that my familiar demon persisted in maintaining an attitude toward Zina so respectful that it was insulting.

Yet, on many other subjects, we found ourselves in the old state of harmonious agreement, she and I. We discovered that we preferred the same books, that we enjoyed the same music. And Zina liked some of my songs so much that she asked me to sing them myself while she accompanied me on the piano.

Had she excited my desire half as much as she stimulated my brain, I would never have left Tunis and I should still be living a happy life with her there.

It was not God's will. And I considered it impossible to say to a young and beautiful woman, who was obviously in love with me:

"Are you willing to spend your whole life at my side as a sister?"

Meanwhile Zina, arguing from our revived spiritual harmony and my renewed good humor, seemed to believe that before long we should be in harmony upon all points. Indeed she began to suggest plans based on the assumption!

I ought to arrange for a transfer to Tunis.

I smiled and did not answer.

She was not discouraged: When I was in Tunis, we would go here, we would do so-and-so. We would settle Aunt Zohra, in the care of a competent nurse, on a little estate she owned in the suburbs . . .

She also began to dispose of Zakia's future, as if Zakia had been our daughter (as I had imprudently written to her once) and were still only a little child. As for me, I did not break my cautious silence to tell her that Zakia, if she was still a child in innocence of heart and sweetness of mind, was already well developed. Her head came above my shoulder and her figure was that of a young girl.

So I spent another week listening to Zina rave. Then she became more silent and began to look at me anxiously.

And those beautiful eyes, always fastened on me, caused me a poignant remorse—as if it had been my fault instead of nature's that Zina did not please my body as she did my mind.

These misunderstandings finally made the atmosphere so intolerable that I wrote to Branguen asking him immediately to send me a telegram—ostensibly from my superior—demanding my return.

The trick was too crude, especially in conjunction with my unenthusiastic behavior. And Zina was not deceived. She said bitterly:

"She of Algiers no doubt finds your absence too long!"

I pretended not to have heard. A little later she added:

"Is she the same one who once before prevented you from being mine—twelve years ago?"

I bowed my head . . . What could I say to her? . . . She took it as an admission, and went on:

"Since you have never married her, it is because she is not worthy. But if ever you free yourself from her, you have only to come to Tunis. I shall wait for you here all my life . . . Because there is only one man in the world for me . . ."

I ought to have answered:

"Do not wait for me, because I shall never come back."

But it is hard to find the courage to plunge those who love you unreasonably into instant despair.

To spare her the anguish of another parting in a railway station, I chose to leave her house that same evening after dark, as soon as she had retired to her room.

When I reached the station in Algiers, there were Branguen, Mahmud, his wife, and another female, well swathed in a homespun *haik* and so carefully veiled that only one of her eyes was visible. At first I thought that it was one of Mahmud's seven daughters, who had taken the opportunity to see a little of the world by accompanying her parents. But the little shape threw its arms around my neck, saying:

"O Mourad! You're here at last!"

Thus did Zakia, greeting me, use the very words with which Zina had hailed my arrival in Tunisia.

Thus had Zakia—while I was vainly trying to walk in my old footsteps—been transformed, and from a child had become a woman, as I knew from the veil which now covered her face.

And if, during an entire month, I had not once felt the slightest emotion in Zina's presence, I now felt a very poignant one as I clasped my ward in my arms.

SOON after returning from Tunis, I found it necessary to go to Kabylia. My father and Lakdar were demanding my presence. For some decision had to be reached concerning the future of Ali's sons, neither of whom was developing as we had a right to expect from the progeny of such a father and the pupils of such a teacher.

Rassim could have learned anything, his mind was quick. But his only interest was machinery, and his rebellious disposition would not yield to studies which did not interest him.

It seemed that in him his father's virtues were transformed into vices. Nature had made the dose too strong, had mixed the ingredients unskillfully.

Courage had become violence, with rebelliousness, noble pride demonic conceit.

Mohammed took after his mother, whom he also resembled physically. But her bad qualities were attenuated in him, and if he was not very intellectual he had good common

sense and though slow he was not really lazy, particularly when it came to using his arms rather than his head.

My master was much affected by this double failure. So was I, but I could not let him see it. And I told him that no one could make a mule into a race-horse and, to console him, cited the example of my old schoolfellow Belkasim, who, after having been a poor scholar, had become a splendid soldier.

At the family gathering over which my father presided, I insisted that, instead of obstinately attempting to make them into scholars, we should immediately start them on careers for which their inclinations and characters appeared to fit them.

Rassim could continue to live in the city with my master, but, since machinery was his passion, he should enter a shop at once.

Mohammed should remain in the *duar* and devote himself to farming our fields under Lakdar's direction—thanks to whose efforts they were now giving an abundant yield.

As for me, as soon as I had returned to Algiers, I made the new arrangements which Zakia's entrance into puberty had rendered necessary.

She could no longer be allowed too much liberty. To tell the truth, she had never had much, but henceforth she was to have none at all.

So, after a consultation with old Cesare, it was decided that our Fatima should come to live in the house.

Old Cesare, now crippled by gout, had to have a woman to help him get up and go to bed and dress and move about. On my side, I thought that Zakia would be well watched, because there is no better guardian for a virgin than an experienced woman who knows the whole gamut of human ruse and falsehood.

Thus my mind would be at rest while I was obliged to be



out of the house attending to my duties as a teacher and to certain others.

I had been asked to take the microphone at the Radio-Algiers station for a series of Berber-language broadcasts. I was free to choose my own subjects, and the pay was good. After some hesitation, I accepted, and before long I think I was doing a reasonably good job.

Most of my other evenings I devoted to teaching Zakia a little something. I had never wished to send her to school—I knew that at school the worse corrupts the better. And since she had never shown any particular liking for study (she had cried over learning the alphabet), I had let things go. But now, to please me, she was willing to study diligently.

However, I had no intention of stuffing such a pretty head. It would be enough if Zakia could read, write, and do sums without counting on her fingers. The Zina I had seen in Tunis had shown me how much of her power over men a woman loses when she has too much education.

Mahmud was often present during our lessons, and soon he became my pupil too. For he was not satisfied with remaining a mere conductor, he wanted to rise to the rank of inspector with a stripe on his sleeve and, above all, a higher salary. To do so, he had to pass a certain examination before reaching the age limit.

Mahmud was intelligent and had a good memory. I found it easy to get him into shape to pass the examination brilliantly. Afterwards he continued to come, simply because he liked to visit us and to talk with me. He was the only person whom I permitted to come near Zakia, and he justified my confidence by the greatest possible discretion. If he happened to arrive early and my ward called through the door, "No, Mourad has not got home yet!" he never insisted on

coming in; instead he went downstairs and waited for me in the street.

In my own relations with Zakia, I forced myself to adopt a less familiar attitude, a much more distant manner than I had permitted myself hitherto. No more holding of hands—which, however innocently begun, may suddenly lead far . . . An end to more or less fatherly kisses . . .

When any man except Mahmud knocked at our door, Zakia knew that she must retire to her room at once. There she pretended to be asleep, even if the visitor insisted upon seeing her on the excuse that he had known her as a little girl.

But it was not often that anyone else came. Except for Branguen, I saw almost nothing of my old companions of the "Friendly Bar." And I had no wish that my sweet lamb should serve as a bait to draw them back to me.

From time to time I saw Manille at the radio station. He was playing in sketches in *lingua franca*. We would say:

"Hello . . . Good-by . . . How are you?"

That was all.

Jean the Painter, I heard, had fallen in love with Morocco and was doing good work there.

The failure of his cantata had made Charlot furious. He was getting ready for his revenge by composing a great symphony. So he avoided me as if the mere sight of me would have made him relapse into popular tunes.

I bore him no ill-will on that account, and when later he asked me to collaborate with him again, I gladly gave him my "Fantasia."

As for Selim, he had been granted a scholarship by a famous art school in Holland, where he was to spend two years under the best possible conditions both for his comfort and his self-respect.

He wrote to me fairly often, and the rapidity of airmail

prevented his letters from losing their infectious warmth and their news value on the way.

Now every day an Air-France seaplane left Algiers for Marseilles at dawn, and every day another, coming from Marignane, landed in the Agha basin . . .

You could go from Algiers to Paris in ten hours, and, before long, in even less time.

Businessmen used no other means of transportation, and in fashionable society it became the mode to fly.

This new passion dethroned the Algerians' old passion for cars. The sons of the leading colonists became civil pilots, a number of large estates had private landing fields.

M. Ferdinand himself preferred to use the new means of transportation, which allowed him to visit France frequently to confer with the leaders of the Government on the subject of the economic crisis which was beginning and in which some people refused to believe.

Thus Papaluet, more optimistic than ever, shrugged his powerful shoulders as he said:

"Come, come! We old hands are too cagey ever to get caught in it!" And, although he had not yet finished paying off the enormous construction costs of the "Centenary Hotel," he demonstrated his confidence by investing heavily in the North African theater, movie-house, and concert-hall trust.

As for Branguen, he alternated between rage and hope. Rage when he considered the present mess and the poverty engendered by the monstrous egotism of those who, having a superfluity, destroyed the commodities without which the poor could not live, rather than sell them at low prices. Hope when he thought that the situation would hasten the coming of socialism, which was his dream.

If I had been an unbeliever and not a Moslem who looked to God Alone for justice, I too should have been tempted

to wish for a change of government, if only because of the way in which my friend Charles had been treated.

Three times now he had passed his written examination for a professorship, and then had failed in the oral examination, which, each time, he had been obliged to go to Paris to take, at great expense.

If Charles was not one of those men whom a first failure stuns, a second discourages, and a third embitters, he did, nevertheless, after the third failure, begin to think that there was something strange going on. Soon afterward, he happened to overhear a conversation between two professors, and he found himself forced to admit that certain examiners were resolved, so far as possible, to close the gates of secondary-school teaching to those whom these aristocrats of thought haughtily called "the primates."

Charles was uncommonly courageous. So he decided to keep on competing, as many times as might be necessary to obtain his degree. He would be a professor, or die trying! . . .

The life he was now leading no longer deserved the name. He was overburdened with his own work and with the tutoring he was obliged to do in order to support his family, which had been increased by a fourth child.

He had come to the point of no longer daring to sleep with Germaine. For a fifth baby would have been a catastrophe which would have made it impossible for him ever to achieve a professorship. Not to mention the disapprobation of society in general.

One child . . . fine!

Two—just permissible.

Three—that was culpable negligence.

Four—sheer indecency.

And in good French society, such prolific people were re-

ferred to with as much disgust as if they were devotees of some unnatural vice.

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At the end of 1932, Selim wrote to me that he was not going to return to Africa. A rich Amsterdam shipowner had offered him a trip to Java on one of his boats. It was a unique opportunity and "He hoped that, remembering his desire to visit the East Indies, I would rejoice with him." In my reply I expressed the wish that He Who Is All-Powerful would protect him on his voyage. Then, gradually, we stopped writing to each other. Java was really too far away.

However, I had news from him once more, through a traveler whose ship touched at Algiers.

Selim sent his best regards to his friends in Algiers. His life in Java was very good . . . There was even some likelihood of his marrying a very rich young lady . . . In return, I asked the obliging traveler to tell Selim that I too was shaping my life toward marriage and that I hoped to found a family before it should be too late.

The fact is that the feeling I had for Zakia—a feeling of which I had become conscious upon my return from Tunis—had become more and more unmistakable as my ward's figure developed into greater and greater womanliness. But when a girl marries too early, her children are likely to be sickly. So I restrained my impatience, though Zakia had become so beautiful she astonished everyone who saw her—or so I was told by Mahmud's wife, to whom I sometimes entrusted her.

After all, a girl has to have a little exercise and a little amusement. Otherwise she becomes anemic, her beauty fades, and her mind rots.

So, once or twice a month, Mahmud's wife took Zakia to the Moorish bath or to the cemetery, with her own daughters.

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In the cemetery at Belcourt there are marvellous cypresses. It is a very beautiful place. Only women are allowed to enter Moslem cemeteries on Fridays, and in fair weather they come early in the morning, bringing their children and a supply of food.

Then until sunset there is picnicking among the little tombs which are marked only by a tablet of marble or plain stone, the birds sing, the children shout happily, their mothers gossip, their elder sisters whisper confidentially, and the old women make comments which are sometimes highly comic.

In this way Zakia, who at home was also amused by Fatima's company and chatter, and whom I showered with presents, led a pleasant life.

Yet Branguen said that I should not have cloistered and veiled my ward, and that it was of little avail to be an educated man if one was going to behave like an ignorant fellah from the *bled*. I did not answer.

What use was it to discuss matters concerning which Christians and Moslems differ too basically ever to reach an agreement!

And when Germaine, who likewise disapproved of my system of education, said:

"Who can you find to marry her, if nobody ever sees her?" I preferred to smile—which is an easy way to avoid answering questions—rather than say:

"I have already found a husband for Zakia."

For a man must never boast aloud that he has determined his own destiny. And the fact is that, in spite of my precautions, Zakia almost escaped me in the most unexpected fashion.

IT may be said that the pogrom which took place at Constantine in 1934 was the signal for the convulsive movements which were soon to shake Algeria and also the prelude to the domestic difficulties which almost brought dishonor into my house.

The pogrom broke out with a suddenness which, if it was astonishing, was characteristic of our African climate. The previous evening, everything seemed calm. By dawn everything was in an uproar. Thus a perfectly dry *wed* is transformed into a furious torrent after a few hours of storm. And it will subside again just as quickly.

At Constantine in 1934 the insurrectionists subsided after they had killed a few usurers and burned their lists of debtors.

The depression was beginning to affect Algiers, as the intelligent had foreseen. And the colonists, because they had been unwilling to lower the price of their wine quickly enough, found themselves with their vats full and with no

idea how to dispose of the current crop of grapes, to say nothing of those to follow.

Papaluet was one of the first to be totally ruined—due to his lack of foresight and to the blindness of all who had participated, closely or distantly, in the notorious “North African Cinema Trust.”

These “gentlemen of large vision” had simply undertaken too much.

Not content with buying and modernizing old theaters, they had built new ones too. There were almost as many movie houses as bars.

But here in Africa, during nine months out of twelve, people find the out-of-doors—the sea, the sky, the beauty of God’s creation—so enticing that they never think of paying to shut themselves up in stuffy theaters. And before long it was so hard to earn even a living that no one was able to spend money for anything but the barest necessities.

Thus did an immoderate ambition and erroneous calculations precipitate a failure which ruined a great many people who had put their hopes and their savings in the trust.

Papaluet, with several other directors, was held responsible and had to submit to the sale of his “Centenary Hotel,” his “King of Beer,” his estate at Pointe Pescade, and even his cars (he had a real harem of them, and his favorite was a Packard).

If he was at least able to resume his old place behind the counter of “Papaluet’s Bar” (so he had rebaptized his café in the Kasbah when he modernized it), it was because Papaluet had hastily transferred the ownership to a friend. But for this ruse, he would have had to sell it with his other possessions. He said:

“Before long *they* will take even my shirt—and then what will I have left to cover me? . . . One hand in front! . . . One hand behind! . . . That’s all!”



And he pantomimed it in his usual comic way.

For the great blow which fate had dealt him had not steeped him in melancholy, any more than it had in wisdom or modesty. He was already talking of new ventures, though he did not specify their nature.

And he bore his ruin as a state of transitory disgrace, of temporary inconvenience, and, while he waited for Divine Favor to return, for Grace to shower him with blessings once more, he condescended to serve drinks to the humble folk of the Kasbah.

At times he even consented—like a Ulysses returned from fabulous countries—to tell them the more sensational episodes of his affluent period, of his marvellous Odyssey to the Land of Gold.

As convincing proof of his stay with Lady Luck, he did not fail to exhibit certain objects saved from the shipwreck: silk shirts, *taiba* suits, a diamond ring.

In misfortune, one must come to the aid of one's friends.

If I had rather turned away from Papaluet when too much honor and wealth were dulling his wits and stimulating his conceit, I now owed it to myself to demonstrate my loyalty to him, and I did not fail to do so, though I cannot claim much merit for it.

Papaluet amused me, and I was glad to return to the pleasures and charms of the Kasbah which I had so long neglected for the "Friendly Bar."

The upper town had a larger population of beautiful girls than ever before, and though there were more Europeans among them—in fact, rather too many—a connoisseur of Oriental beauty could still find something to his taste . . . But at what a price!

Many things had changed in the Kasbah.

The racket of the radio and the international tunes which are its stock in trade overwhelmed the little Moslem orches-

tras which some of the dancing houses still felt obliged to maintain.

Meanwhile, from the patios of the "Decent Houses" the song of the sewing machine proclaimed that the difficulties of material existence had forced even Moslem women to sacrifice their rest to progress.

"Wherever the machine comes, shame comes with it," Lalla Urida told me sententiously. And she spat with disgust . . .

She was sick of it! . . . She was worn out! . . . Several of her sons were without work. So she herself was constantly on the run between the Kasbah and the French town, the French town and the Kasbah, picking up and delivering the needlework which her granddaughters had to do because neither their fathers nor their brothers nor their husbands earned enough to keep them.

And my old apartment was occupied by a certain Mulud, who had recently come home from working in a French factory . . . And Mulud had forced them all to associate with a Christian woman . . . who was his legal wife . . . who did not veil herself even when she went out with him . . . and who told the other women in the house everything that she had seen at the movies! . . . A perpetual scandal! . . .

I also had the curiosity to knock at Baya's door one evening.

The Negress was dead. Her place had been taken by an old white crone who was not her match . . .

The patio was practically as I had known it. But in the rear of the house partitions had been knocked down and now, in the very place where M. Ferdinand and the Kaid of the Beni Unif used to play chess, there was a projection room where movies were shown to tourists.

Baya herself, except for having grown fatter—which is not unbecoming in our full dresses—had changed very little. However, she avoided letting much light fall on her face, and

she seemed to be ruled by a certain Mohammed, who was too young, quite handsome, had been a boxer, and now contented himself with eating and drinking.

In his presence, Baya pretended not to recognize me. But before the night was over, Mohammed fell asleep, and she came to me in the patio, where I had retired after having amused myself rather unsatisfactorily with one of her girls who had a very Oriental face, wore our native costume with ease, but came straight from Belleville.

Baya said that I was hard to please. Most of her clients were made about Sarmel. (Her name was really Marcelle, but thus transposed it seemed quite Oriental too.)

I answered:

"You know that I have always preferred our Kabyle women, and that I loved you most of all."

Which had been true for a short time, and one should at least be courteous when one is no longer in love.

After that we talked of other things, and subjects of conversation between us were not hard to find after such a long separation.

So when I left Baya's house, it was dawn. The muezzins were calling the faithful to the first prayer. In the distance the bells of the infidels sounded too. And the air had the same perfume it had carried to my nostrils long ago, when I came to the Kasbah from my native *bled*.

But twenty years had passed, and suddenly I felt the weight and the bitterness of them.

So, although Baya had warmly urged me to return, I did not. The more so as the recollection of our precious memories had not stopped her from presenting me, the following morning, with a bill which had completely emptied my pocket.

And I soon found myself busy with less pleasant matters, through the fault of my nephew Rassim.

Rassim had behaved fairly well for several years. At most, I had had to pay a debt for him from time to time, or assume responsibility for some outburst of violence against a man or a woman!

But he had learned his machinist's trade thoroughly, which was the essential thing. And I already saw myself setting him up one day in a new country, Morocco, for example—that is, so far away that he would not be a constant source of trouble and irritation to me through the rest of my life.

Such was not God's will!

And one evening my brother Lakdar arrived, bringing news so bad that my master had not wanted to trust it to the mails.

Rassim, suspected of inciting natives to revolt and distributing communist tracts, had just been placed under arrest.

So far, apparently, the evidence against him was not too overwhelming. We could still try to get him out of jail by bestirring ourselves at once in some influential quarter, before there was time for the accusation to become more precise.

The next day I immediately asked and obtained an audience with M. Ferdinand.

But, for the first time, I found him unwilling to hear me out.

At the mere word "communist," his eyes became blood-shot, his face furious, and he threw himself on the red idea with all the fury of a bull in the ring.

I begged and implored him. (It was such a hard thing for my pride that I would certainly not have done it for myself, or even perhaps for one of my sons, but when Ali had gone to war I had promised him that I would look after his family.) At last M. Ferdinand said:

"If Rassim is freed, will you be responsible for him to me?"

I said: "Yes!"

What else could I say?

He added:

"Take him into your house, watch him, and make sure that he does not do it again . . . Otherwise! . . . For a Frenchman, it would be a serious matter—for a Moslem it means prison or death . . . For my part—no matter what happens, I can do nothing more . . . Good-by, Mourad!"

Rassim was freed and arrived at my house a week later.

He was a strapping fellow of twenty, with a touching resemblance to his father. It seemed that He whom it is best never to name \* had taken a malign pleasure in masking this son of rebellion under the features of a man whose short life had been an example of perpetual renunciation, of loyalty to duty even to the supreme sacrifice.

Rassim listened in silence while, as nearly and as emphatically as I could, I repeated M. Ferdinand's remarks (I took care not to mention his name). And when I had finished he remained equally silent.

Then, taking him by the arm, I led him before his father's portrait and I added:

"Ask yourself if *he* died serving France so that today his son might serve disorder?"

I was quite pleased with this formula, but Rassim looked me in the face and answered:

"One war for one man, another for another!"

I exhorted him no further that evening!

Next I set about finding a job for him. And, despite the partial unemployment, I found one, thanks to the influence of the father of one of my pupils and—it must be admitted—to Rassim's skill at his trade.

And I also asked Branguen to try to influence him, believing that socialism would be a lesser evil—although for my part I had a poor opinion of its philosophy, which under-

\* The Devil.

takes to hamstringing the strong for the benefit of the weak, as if the weak, in the long run, were not able covertly to destroy anyone who is superior to them or whose greatness humiliates them.

Thus is oak hollowed by termites, iron eaten by rust, thus are lions devoured by vermin, and saints like my father overwhelmed by the folly and vices of all the petty folk of the *duar*!

Rassim listened to Branguen's sermons a little too patiently. I should have preferred outbursts of rage to this sickly politeness which seemed to say:

"Talk as much as you please!"

At most, he would occasionally bring up an objection to some point of dogma.

I did not interfere. I knew nothing of the subject, and in the next room Zakia was talking, singing, laughing. She had a musical voice, it suggested the cooing of a turtle-dove.

Because I did not see her as often as I wished, I regaled myself with this emanation of her.

My nephew's intrusion had obliged me to shut Zakia up more closely and even to lock her in on occasion—if, for example, I had to go out to work at a time when old Cesare required Fatima's services.

Fatima had been given very strict instructions. Under no circumstances was she to allow my nephew to approach Zakia in my absence. She had promised, she had even sworn it . . . And she had sworn it by her father, her mother, and the Koran.

But I should have remembered that women are rather vague in their respect for promises and that their idea of honor is extremely relative.

Thus does Satan dull the minds of those whom he would deceive, and though I was acting like a blind man, I thought myself very foresighted.

For I flattered myself that Rassim had returned to his senses because he always came straight home from work, and that he respected the laws of hospitality because he never even seemed to notice that, separated from him by a mere partition, there was another woman besides Fatima.

For her part, Zakia asked me no questions, never complained of her more secluded life, did not even seem to suffer from it.

Never had she been so fresh, so rosy, so laughing, so charming. Nor so affectionate toward me.

At this juncture I found myself obliged to replace the other native speaker at the radio station. He was ill. This caused me a great deal of work and heartache. I was less familiar than he with literary Arabic, and I did not want my broadcasts to be inferior to his.

It lasted barely two weeks, but it was time enough for the Evil One to achieve his purpose. And Zakia would have been lost to me forever if a technical accident which forced a change in the order of programs and caused the cancellation of the Arabic-language broadcasts had not, one evening, allowed me to return home a little earlier than usual, and just in time.

For I found Rassim and Zakia so close to each other that there was no doubt in my mind but that, a few minutes later, they would have been one!

Without a word, I tore Zakia out of Rassim's arms and undertook to give him the punishment he deserved for having thus abused the confidence of his closest relative after his father, of the man who had saved him from prison.

But instead of allowing himself to be thrashed without protesting—as one of my generation would have done if he had found himself in a similar situation in regard to an elder—he dared to defend himself.

He was strong and malicious.

But the knowledge of the old can be a substitute for the vigor of the young. And I had to win, if only to keep my prestige in the eyes of my Zakia, who, cowering in a corner with her hands clasped and her mouth open, watched us, unable to utter a sound.

When I picked myself up, she made no motion toward me, but she wanted to throw herself on my victim. From which I knew that the young scoundrel had found his way into her heart, and I began to fear that he had found it elsewhere too and that there had already been certain irreparable contacts between them.

So, paying no further attention to my nephew, I ordered Zakia to pack a few clothes and veil herself while, for my part, I hurriedly tidied my hair, brushed myself off, and changed my coat, since the one I was wearing had been damaged by Rassim's nails.

Then I took her to Mahmud's house. I gave him a brief account of the affair and he promised to see that no one should come near her, least of all my nephew.

But when, having thus left Zakia in good hands, I returned home, my nephew had vanished. He had taken his belongings, plus a sum of money which was my personal property and which had been put away in a little chest which he had not hesitated to break open.

Putting off any search for Rassim until later, I devoted myself to finding Fatima, whom I at last discovered in a dark cubbyhole which was used as a storeroom. She was pretending to sleep too deeply for verisimilitude, especially after the racket which Rassim and I had made while we were fighting. So I woke her with a few well-aimed blows, and then she tried to justify herself by manufacturing a tale about having been herself crossed in love in her youth and about a young man who looked as much like my nephew as one devil does like another. All of which had forced her (it was like a sort



of spell) to try to re-live her own old idyl—dead for twenty to thirty years—in the person of Zakia.

But as I found a considerable sum of money on her and she could not explain where it had come from, I had reason to believe that it had played some part in her treachery. So I threw her out of the house without further ceremony. Then I went and told old Cesare what had happened.

I found him on the floor, he had fallen out of his chair. When I had picked him up, he said:

“Ah! if that is all, so much the better! . . . What with the noise you made at first, and then utter silence, I thought you had killed each other. So I tried to stand up, and *bang!* . . . You were right to throw her out, my son! . . . But until we find another woman, you will have to help me get up and go to bed and dress and everything.”

I did so. (Fortunately for us both, it was not for very long. Because of the unemployment, we were soon able to find another servant.)

As for Zakia . . . At first I had sworn to put her out of my life forever as a proper punishment—if necessary, by marrying her off to the first comer. But I changed my decision after Mahmud's wife had guaranteed to me that, if she had been touched it was not the essential thing which had suffered. Indeed, according to this expert matron, the latter appeared to be perfectly intact.

And when I saw Zakia again, her expression filled me with such pity that I almost forgot my wrongs in my concern for her grief.

But was it true, as Mahmud's wife assured me, that her grief was caused only by her regret at having displeased me, and her fear that I would send her away from me forever? Was it not rather caused by her regret at being separated from Rassim?

God alone could have given the answer, for only He knew

and knows to this day. But if yesterday, if today, I could have asked Him, I would not do so.

In some cases, doubt and ignorance are better than knowledge. And possibly Zakia, now that she is the happy mother of a family, no longer really knows what her state of mind was then.

For the moment, in my uncertainty as to what such an audacious fellow as Rassim might attempt, I thought it best that Zakia should not return to my apartment. And after much walking, much talking, and much seeking, I found a perfectly safe retreat for her. I gave no one the address.

It was at a sort of charitable foundation and workshop for Moslem girls and women of humble birth. The workshop was in Mustapha Supérieur and directly under the supervision of a Christian lady of high rank.

Like my master, she had the reputation of adoring everything Moslem, but her disinterestedness left something to be desired and I was later to realize that, under a show of philanthropy, she derived the greater part of her income from the workshop and the labors of her charges.

However, she governed her flock with a severity most desirable in the eyes of a man who, like myself, had just been cruelly disillusioned. And although her house was full, she consented to receive Zakia as soon as I had paid her a considerable sum.

So, less than two weeks after Rassim's disappearance (I knew nothing of him except that he had not returned to his job), I took my ward to her new refuge myself.

For prudence's sake I went to Mahmud's for her in a closed taxi, and for safety's sake I had the taxi stop when we had climbed the hill to the Summer Palace. And, although the road was steep, we went the rest of the way on foot. Thus, I believed, I had shaken off all possible pursuers—that is, Rassim.

A few days later, I learned that Rassim had sailed for France. But since I had not seen him go aboard ship with my own eyes, I continued to take endless precautions each time I went to visit Zakia.

At first, still much upset and displeased by her bad behavior, I went rather infrequently and never brought her any little presents. For she must be made to feel how much she had hurt me.

Later I went more often—more often, indeed, than the regulations allowed. But at that time our wedding day was approaching, and the joyful fashion in which Zakia had greeted that future event led me to believe that she had absolutely banished the memory of Rassim and of a short moment of madness.

It is true that life was quite unpleasant in the workshop, where she was forever weaving, embroidering, sewing, mending . . . And, describing the life which she would soon be living with me, I rather expatiated on the decent pleasures which awaited her and the good and beautiful things which would be hers in profusion.

I was not lying. Two new songs—"I Am Jealous . . ." and "The Faded Rose"—had brought me a small fortune. And my pay at the radio station had been doubled.

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Our wedding was celebrated in January, 1936. It seemed imprudent to wait longer. Zakia had reached her full development, and despite her apparent quiet and my constant watchfulness, I feared that Rassim might return.

It was this above all which decided me not to wait for a more propitious season.

The fact is that neither my father nor my master was able to come. Snow blocked the roads, and they were no longer young enough to face hard traveling.

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It was Lakdar who bestowed the family embrace upon me and also brought me sacks of flour and semolina, several jars of oil, honey, a fat sheep, and a number of chickens, all intended for the banquet which is customary on such occasions.

And his wife had woven some stuff of mixed silk and wool for mine, and it was she who dressed her on the wedding day.

Zakia did not leave the foundation until the day before our wedding, merely to go to a Moorish bath. Thus she had not time—even if she had wished—to indulge in the slightest caprice before falling into my arms.

And the wedding festivities took place in the new dwelling which I had especially chosen and furnished for an unruffled married life.

The house was near enough to the sea to get a good breeze, and not so far from my school that I could not sometimes return unexpectedly—if only at recess—to see what was going on, whether for good or for evil.

It stood in a garden which was enclosed by a high wall. In addition, I had the top of the wall fitted with pieces of very sharp glass—which is still the best way that has been found to discourage thieves and lovers, or to split them alive if they do try to climb over.

This house, whose Oriental design charmed the eye, also possessed all the conveniences of Occidental modernism. If the patio was decorated with a marble basin in which a slender fountain played, it was lighted by electricity; if the rooms were merely whitewashed, they had running water; and if the bathroom was paved with antique mosaics, it also glittered with rustproof metal.

For my wedding, I would greatly have liked to assemble almost as many Christian guests in my house as Moslems.

It was not possible. Most of my French acquaintances seemed to be shocked at my marrying Zakia, and they did not

even have the politeness to hide their feelings. Consequently, I preferred to leave most of them out of sight—and out of mind—on the great day.

Branguen had said, in a most disagreeable tone:

“The girl can’t possibly really love you . . . And women have a right to love, as the poor have a right to bread! . . .”

He had come to have an absolute mania for dragging justice into everything—even into people’s beds. But Mahmud answered for me:

“Who can tell you that she will not love Mourad after the first night? . . . In any case, she will certainly be mad with joy when she holds her first son in her arms . . . For a woman does not have to feel pleasure with a man in order to have a child, whereas a man has to feel it in order to give her one. And thus, from the beginning of the world, God indicated in what a state of submission, dependence, and inferiority He intended to keep women . . . And you who are but a man would be wrong to think yourself wiser than He!”

Branguen had shrugged his shoulders and thrown up his hands, but he had not answered.

Germaine was almost violent:

“After all, Mourad! You brought the child up!”

Charles tried to make her admit that behavior may be decent even if it differs from the behavior of Christians, but he did not himself seem particularly convinced of the validity of his arguments.

Only Papaluet approved. He said:

“Dio Cane! The champagne will be on me! . . . Nonsense! What do you think? I lost my houses, but I kept my cellar! Well, you certainly know how to find them—a beauty of beauties! Be easy, son! . . . I think this one will be honest too!”

It is true that in Zakia I found perfect submission and absolute innocence.

Her modesty, her reserve, her timid tenderness, revealed a genuine virgin. And, by comparison, I realized how suspicious my first wife's ardors had been.

For a new love cannot but reawaken the memory of past loves, good or evil.

I did not send Zina, my former fiancée, word of my marriage until fairly late, when it had already been a fact for more than a month. And she did not answer me until long afterward, in these few enigmatic words:

"If God has not permitted us to be united now, perhaps he will unite us some other day. I shall do all that I can to bring it about."

I did not fully understand this curious message until the end of April, when I received another letter from Zina. She wrote:

"I am getting ready to go to Mecca. If it is granted me to survive the fatigues of the pilgrimage, I shall have gained the greatest of joys, together with the hope of Paradise which, among us, is allowed only to women who are *Hajas*.\* See to it, Mourad, that you yourself remain worthy of Paradise!"

She added that the pilgrim ship left Tunis two days later.

So it was useless for me to answer, as my letter would not have arrived until after she had gone.

And what could I have written to her, without appearing to be a fool and ungrateful? . . . And what could I offer her to match the heroic obstinacy of a being determined to win me at all costs, even if she must go to heaven to accomplish her purpose.

The thought of her sacrifice troubled me greatly, especially during the first days after I learned of it.

My thoughts followed Zina perpetually. I saw her again as she used to look, before my fatal trip to Tunis, and it was as the fragile child whom I had once so deeply loved that I

\* A *Haja* is a woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

now pictured her, alone on the long road, which was sown with mortal trials and unknown dangers. Or so said the pilgrims who had traversed it and whom we had often listened to together, in our *duar*.

I would be holding her little hand in mine as we listened, and from time to time, carried away by emotion, she would murmur:

"Oh, Mourad!"

And still, every instant, her faithful thoughts never ceased repeating: "Mourad! . . . Mourad! . . . Mourad! . . ."

Traveling toward God, she perpetually included me in the adoration which is due to Him Alone!

And I felt exalted, enthralled, by this passion which so far outwent anything one usually expects from the frivolity and inconstancy of women. And I was very near to loving Zina again.

Thus, in spite of Zakia's youth and beauty, I forgot the delights of her body to bind myself more closely, more ideally, to her who for my love was walking the hard road which leads to the Holy City of Mecca. And there were brief moments when in this way I attained a sort of ecstasy, the like of which I had not experienced since the days when I smoked kief.

But fasting whets appetite, and Zakia was within reach of my desire. I soon hungered for her.

I was also distracted from my concern for Zina by serious events of general import, which later even threatened to cause me personal difficulties.

In May, 1936, the French elections almost brought fire and the sword to the whole of Algeria, especially to our city and the surrounding countryside. For Algiers, because of the factory districts in its suburbs, had voted for the left-wing parties, and the latter were triumphing without discretion.

Thus, as soon as the results of the elections were an-

nounced, we were regaled with the spectacle of a parade. Tens of thousands marched in it, Moors and Latins alike.

Government officials in black coats and striped trousers (M. Ferdinand's habitual costume), crowned with derby hats and preceded by well-nourished bellies, rubbed elbows with authentic workmen in blue jumpers and with men whose faces were more or less suggestive of the gallows and into whose professions it was doubtless better not to inquire.

Baya's Mohammed proudly waved a flag lettered in red with the slogan: "We want bread too." But when I told Branguen about it, he called me a relic of feudalism and accused me of trying to belittle an admirable mass movement . . .

Various sports clubs and, above all, certain famous bands of furious trumpet-players—whose headgear was reminiscent of St-Cyr, while their tunics suggested a circus—added to our visual and auditory pleasure.

Nor were women and children excluded from the parade. At the head of a group of Fatimas walked an old crone brandishing a veil which should have covered her face, as if to signify that henceforth Moslem women intended to shake off all constraint and abandon the most decent customs of our great tradition.

Someone in the crowd of spectators shouted:

"Old woman! . . . Better go home and roll *kuskus*."

Which aroused general laughter. For no one here—Latin or Moorish, left-wing or right-wing—is for the emancipation of women.

There followed several days filled with more or less comic incidents and more or less serious affrays between representatives of divergent opinions.

Then, while most of the workers contented themselves with sitting in their factories and playing the accordion, armed bands began to spread outside the city.



It will never be ascertained who gave the watchword, but suddenly they all knew that it was necessary to reach the ignorant people who were still working, the unfortunates, the unemployable, the *bahluls* (simpletons), the scum of the earth.

Off they went . . . marching . . . strolling . . . Ah ya yaiei! What a pleasure! . . . The weather was wonderful . . . And when they reached the first estates, they shouted to the bowed and humble serfs:

"O brother! Rise! Come with us! . . . Orders from the new *Beylik* in France! . . . Tear up your contract with your master! It's all over! The poor will never have to work again!"

People close to the soil are always slow to understand such things—they even do not want to understand them. And their ingrained common sense is enough to tell them that the earth has never covered itself with grain and vegetables and fruits by its own efforts . . .

So, in general, they shook their heads:

"No, I haven't got time! Good-by. Thanks just the same. Some other day!"

What nincompoops! They didn't understand!

Some argued:

"If I don't work, are you going to pay me? . . . And if you nor anyone else isn't going to pay me for doing nothing, who will support my wife and children?"

However, when they were threatened, they dropped their picks and shovels and followed the movement.

Little by little, it became a real army. Along the road now one, now another would pull up one of those pointed stakes which are intended to support grapevines but which can also be used on occasion to run a man through . . . They ravaged a few fields of tomatoes . . . they sacked bakeshops . . . nothing very bad as yet. Why be brutal when you know

that you hold victory in your firmly clenched fist . . . And do you destroy what belongs to you?

Meanwhile the colonists, barricaded on their farms, gun in hand, prepared to answer violence with violence, to hold out as long as possible against the terrific assault which would be launched by the first shot, the first blazing haystack.

But for two days and two nights—surprising as it may seem—there was no shooting and no incendiarism . . .

And on the morning of the third day, at the insistence of M. Ferdinand, whom the new government had not yet dared to recall, the Prefect decided to do something, and soon afterward tanks and Mobile Guards appeared on the roads, while squadrons of planes cruised in a cloudless sky.

And the herd of demonstrators was surrounded and pushed back toward the city. And thus those who had left it proud of their new rights returned with hanging heads and handcuffs on their wrists.

That night I heard a knocking at the door of my house. I rose, went to the window, and asked:

“Who’s there? What do you want?”

A low voice answered:

“In the name of your brother Ali, open!”

Rassim had done well to employ a formula which made me remember the promise I had long since given my brother.

For if he had simply said his name that night, perhaps I should have left him outside, if only to avoid the slightset emotion for Zakia in her condition at the time.

I went downstairs, opened the door, and let my enemy into my house.

I was going to ask him how long he had been back from France and who had given him my new address, but as soon as I turned on the light, I forgot about that. For his face was smeared with blood, his clothes were in rags, and his bare feet were soiling the carpet.

The sight of him would have sufficed to tell me approximately what his experiences had been, and he confirmed my impression in a few words.

For two days, on the roads of the Sahel and the highways of the Mitidja, he had tried—he told me—to awaken the others from their stupid apathy . . . But they all said: “Tomorrow! If it is God’s will! It is such a beautiful day! And we are already masters of the world!”

The fools had almost all let themselves get caught! “Nobody would dare to arrest them,” they had said. Nonsense! . . . The gendarmes had begun firing on them when they didn’t put up their hands fast enough . . . Better to die than surrender to those swine! The first bullet had missed him . . . the second had clipped off a piece of his ear, but he reached the turn . . .

Then he had waited for dark, hidden in the ditch.

He had reached this point in his narrative when Zakia, no doubt disquieted by our long conversation (she did not know who my interlocutor was), appeared at the door.

I cannot describe how beautiful she looked at that moment—her hair down, her eyes wide with fear, and her hands instinctively protecting her belly, in which lay the promise of her first motherhood.

Rassim looked at her, at me, and also at her belly.

I said:

“She is my wife now, my wife before the *kadi*.”

He snickered and then, in an indefinable tone, said:

“Good! She would only have been in my way!”

I do not know if Zakia heard him, she had already withdrawn into the shadow of the door.

Then I did what had to be done and gave Rassim something to eat and drink. And when he had changed his clothes and I had bandaged him, I wrapped him in my old burnoose, letting one of the corners hang over his face, and we set out.

Twice on our way we encountered police patrols who halted us, but when I gave my name and told that I worked at Radio-Alger, they did not bother us and even politely excused themselves for having suspected us of being trouble-makers.

When we arrived at Papaluet's place, he was still up, and all alone—that is, except for a single drunken customer . . . Seeing from my manner that something unusual was afoot, he immediately threw out the drunk, and, while the latter continued to shout from the gutter, put up the blinds, closed the door, and took us down to the cellar.

A moment later, while Rassim slept, we were on our way to the harbor, where we had the luck (what can you do without luck?) to find a certain captain of a Majorcan lateen-rigger, a friend and fellow-townsmen of Papaluet's.

So the next night, Rassim, supplied with food and money, was able to embark for the Balearic Islands, which are Spanish territory.

When I returned home, Zakia's eyes were red, but I was careful not to mention the fact. I simply said:

"I have done what I could, for the sake of my brother's memory. If God please, I think he is safe!"

Then she took my hand and kissed it, and we never spoke of Rassim again.

At the end of the month, I learned that he had made port. Since that time I have never heard of him. He had not even thanked me when we parted.

And at the end of June, when the pilgrim ship from Mecca put in at Algiers on its return trip, I received a visit from an old man who brought me sad news.

He had been present when Zina died. She had succumbed to something which, to judge from the description he gave of it, closely resembled typhoid fever, and it appeared that she had contracted this terrible disease by her extreme devo-

tion in nursing certain poor people who were in no way connected with her.

She had been buried not far from Holy Place . . .

He added:

“God granted that she should not die until she had accomplished the pilgrimage. And she gave me this message for you:

“ ‘Tell him that it is well that it is so, and that I shall wait for him in the place of which he knows.’ ”

MAKTUB—it is Fate!

## ♦ 30 ♦

THREE women seem to have occupied a really important place in my life. (For Baya the Dancer was only a momentary caprice of passion.)

Of the others, I can say:

That Yamina was a bad wife—of whom, nevertheless, I retain a vibrant memory.

That Zakia now does her best to provide me with a calm, domestic happiness.

But—if God finds me worthy thereof—Zina alone shall be my eternal wife, in Paradise.

Yet I cannot help thinking that if things had been a little different—that is, if luck had sent the three women into my harem simultaneously—my life could have been a perpetual rejoicing.

For Zina had the mind of an angel,

Yamina had the ardor of a demon,

And Zakia has that patient sweetness which is one of the highest virtues in this world, particularly for a woman.

But, because it was not written, it was not to be, and it is useless to regret what it is impossible to dream of beginning over again.

Besides, I should have needed the wealth of a *kaid* to support three wives in a period when what costs a *douro* today will cost three tomorrow and ten next week.

So I am content with things as they are—and the more so because at last I have two sons and Zakia is soon to give birth to another child.

I gave my elder son the proud name of my brother Ali. The second bears that of my venerated father Brahim. If God grants that my third child shall likewise be a son, I shall name him Mohammed, in honor of our Prophet.

Three sons are already a fine progeny, and I may yet have more. If it is a girl, I shall name her Muna, and you may believe that she will be very dear to me.

However that may be, since my brothers, nephews, and cousins are all well provided with male offspring too, the name of the Ben Ahmed Shelifs, and the Kabyle race, are likely to outlive the modern world and the senseless battles which the Christians fight in it against one another.

As for me, God alone knows if I have yet many years to live. But for some time I have observed and felt certain undeniable symptoms of age . . .

My hair is still thick and black, but my teeth are going, and I have a tendency toward stoutness.

You cannot be happy without putting on some fat, Zakia makes excellent pastries, and since I married her I am seldom seen walking the roads or pedaling over them on a bicycle.

As Mahmud says:

“You have to beware of all wives . . . For if the bad ones make you thin with sorrow, the good ones fatten you up on purpose so that you can’t run after the others.”

Mahmud has always had the humor of a philosopher and

his wit has been delightful ever since he had the satisfaction of marrying off his youngest daughter, who was something of a dwarf and almost humpbacked, to a one-eyed man in the city of Medea.

So, each time he prays, he thanks God for that. "Because," he says, "having seven daughters proves that God wished to punish me for my sins . . . But marrying them all off means that He has forgiven me. And I shall never cease to render Him thanks, to my dying day."

Mahmud has lived in my house since he lost his old wife, and he does not seek to replace her at present, for the pension paid him by the Streetcar Company, which he had the honor to serve for thirty years, is just enough to keep an old man alive.

I sincerely hope that Mahmud will remain here. Our house is big, my sons adore him (they call him Uncle), and while they climb onto his knees and listen to the wonderful stories he makes up, Zakia can peacefully go about her numerous duties.

And—for my part—at least when I come home from work I have someone to talk to. It is only with men that one can really exchange ideas, for most women understand nothing about philosophy and it is well known how much they despise anything that they do not understand and how, sometimes, they even try to destroy it.

Mahmud plays a very good game of chess too.

And when we are not playing chess, if we prefer to be silent, we smoke our narghile (a single narghile for two months, because tobacco is getting expensive even here).

Most days—thanks to the mildness of our climate—Mahmud and I sit on the terrace-roof of my house to talk or play chess or smoke.

So we did this evening, on this first day of summer in the year 1945.



The sky was miraculously clear and studded with stars each more brilliant than the next.

Just as in the distant days when I was an ignorant young shepherd on a mountain top in Upper Kabylia and my cousin Zina rested her pretty head on my shoulders and said: "When God lights all his lamps, it means that He is holding a great festival in Paradise . . ."

Now Zina is sharing in that festival. But I must remain on earth, among mankind, so long as it shall be God's will. And wonderful as it may be to dwell Up Above, yet I hope that He will give me time to bring up my sons Here Below.

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When the coals in the narghile had gone out, Mahmud said:

"Good night, and pleasant dreams! . . ."

But one can sometimes dream without sleeping, and while Mahmud went down to bed, I remained on the terrace . . .

Then a scent of jasmin (I do not know where it came from, perhaps it was but an exhalation of memory) suddenly mingled with the spell of the sky shining with all its stars, and it was as if Zina were really there beside me.

Thus, immaterial as she has become, I shall always be able to find her again in the brightness of a star, in the sweet scent of pale jasmins.

I did not dare to move, for fear of breaking the lovely spell, and I cannot guess how long I remained in ecstasy, for time cannot always be measured as arbitrarily as men try to measure it with their clocks . . . I might have remained there until dawn, if Zakia, who had finished putting the children to bed, had not come up to join me on the terrace.

She was beside me before I was even aware of her approach . . . Her step is light and the more surely to surprise me, she had taken off her *babushs*.

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And, laying her hand on my shoulder, she said:

"O Mourad, what are you thinking of?"

I could have answered, as many men often do:

"I . . . oh, nothing . . ."

And she would not have pressed me, for she is submissive and deferential.

But that empty formula has never satisfied any woman in the world, I am truly fond of Zakia, and, in her condition, it is best to avoid disappointing her or displeasing her in any way.

While I was looking for a compromise which, while satisfying what I owed both to her peace of mind and my own, would also have a plausible appearance of truth, a plane hummed over our heads. But for the noise of the motor, it might have been a star moving.

I smiled at Zakia and said:

"Look, my beauty . . . See that plane?"

"Yes, I see it . . . What about it?"

"I was thinking that my old Aunt Zohra used to say: 'Beware of machines, because the Devil is hidden inside them!' . . ."

Satisfied by my answer, Zakia began to laugh. Then she spoke in her turn:

"She was right, your old aunt . . . And wrong too . . . Half good . . . Half evil . . . In that, machines are like so many other things in this new world . . ."

Far off, the deep and musical voice of a muezzin chanted:

"Praise! Praise! Praise! To the Merciful threefold praise! . . ."

And together Zakia and I left the terrace, holding each other tenderly by the hand . . .

T H E E N D



## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC AND BERBER WORDS

agha—*administrative officer superior to kaid (q.v.)*

akarbi—I swear it

baba—*pappa*

babush—*slipper*

bahlul—*simpleton*

baraka—*gift of luck*

barda—*pack*

barud—*hand-to-hand battle*

bash-agma—*administrative officer superior to agha (q.v.)*

beylik—*government*

bled—*up-country*

borj—*mountain fortress*

derbuka—*a kind of drum*

duar—*village*

filali—*crudely tanned leather*

fissa—*quick*

gandurah—*a loose, sleeveless shirt reaching below the knees*

gum—*troop*

gurbi—*hut*

halluf—*swine*

hammam—*Moorish bath*

hashashin—*hashish-smoker*

inshallah—if God wills, as God wills

jebira—*leather bag*

jemma—*council*

jinna—*fairy*

kahwa—*coffee*

kahwaji—*operator of a café*

kaid—*chief, magistrate*

kannun—*traditional law*  
 khammes—*estate-managers under the Turkish domination. The ca.*  
*was perpetuated after the French conquest*  
 kif-kif—*like*  
 kufin—*a kind of basket*  
 kuskus—(1) *pearl semolina; (2) a dish made from it*  
 Lalla—*Madam*  
 mabul—*fool, crackpot*  
 maktub—*it is Fate*  
 manarf—*all is doubt*  
 marabut—*priest*  
 medersa—*Moslem university*  
 meskin—*poor, wretched*  
 mujer—*woman (Spanish)*  
 noria—*water wheel*  
 raita—*bagpipe*  
 rekba—*feud*  
 rumi—*applied derogatively to a Christian. Feminine: rumia*  
 sabir—*lingua franca*  
 salam-aleiks—*ceremonious salutations*  
 sarwal—*full, pleated trousers*  
 sha-ush—*body-servant*  
 sheshiya—*tarboosh, fez*  
 shudi—*monkey*  
 shuf—*look (verb)*  
 Sidi—*Mister*  
 Sidna—*Lord*  
 smala—*retinue*  
 suk—*bazaar*  
 taiba—*excellent, first-class*  
 taleb—*learned man*  
 tubib—*doctor of medicine*  
 walad-nail—*dancing girl*  
 wed—*channel or bed of watercourse, dry except in rainy season*  
 ya—*O*





















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